





Countess Obernau

AFTER THE GERMAN

By Julien Gordon,

Author of "A Diplomat's Diary," etc.

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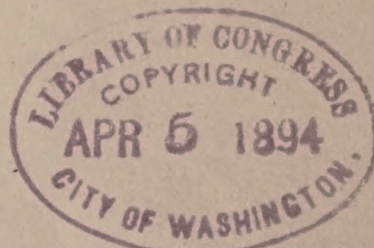
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NEW YORK:
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COUNTESS OBERNAU.

CHAPTER I.

THERE is no lovelier spot in northern Germany than the Terrace of Brühl, at Dresden, in springtime. One emerald-green June day several young men sat facing the Baldin Pavilion, smoking cigars, sipping their ices and coffee and criticising or ridiculing the passers-by.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon, and consequently no elegant woman was to be seen. They were fearful of the sun's heat, notwithstanding the cool shade of the trees. The more striking, therefore, was the presence of one lady, evidently belonging to the higher ranks of society, sitting apart, on a

bench, with her back to the Pavilion, unconscious of the young men's gossip or of the noisy children who swarmed on the Terrace like ants. She sat unobserved, a too well known apparition to be interesting. She was hard at work sketching, and near by stood a man-servant, like a statue, holding her parasol, that no sunbeam or flicker should disturb her task. Her eyes glanced quickly from landscape to drawing, and her hand, fearless of tan, and freer for being ungloved, followed dexterously the bidding of her eyes. She was quite absorbed in her work.

"Lady Geraldine has left for Tepliz to-day; that is my last news," said a young man of the group.

"That is no news at all," replied another. "It was well understood long ago—ancient history."

"But it was to be to-morrow."

"No; to-day."

"I beg your pardon, to-morrow."

"Well, she's gone, at any rate," said a third; "and soon Dresden will have died out, and we must get off, too, for it is insupportable; only unknown faces."

"I rather like strange faces. One meets them *en route* to the baths, like birds of passage."

"Ah, strange faces—that is quite different; I like them too, and they are easily picked out. I

mean the nobodies, whose names, if repeated a hundred times, you cannot retain; people who exact your salutation because you have elbowed them in some *salon*. Dresden is as full of these now as the night of specters."

"I pity every one who is obliged to pass the summer here."

"Last night Count Mengen arrived. The ambassador only waited for him, to start for the baths, and so he remained *solo soletti*!"

"But he can ride everywhere, and solitude, after all, is amusing."

"Oh, most to be coveted! And where do you go?"

"It is uncertain. Here and there; in the country; to friends; later to Tepliz. If Prince Clary would organize the races there, it would become more fashionable. The Viennese would send their horses. It is inconceivable that Clary does not recognize this advantage."

"Do you know Count Mengen?"

"I saw him this morning at Feldern's, his old college friend's; but only for a moment; we were introduced, and then he left for his ambassador's."

"Is he a good-looking fellow?"

"I think so. He must look fine on horseback."

"But, dear Centaur, one can't sit on one's horse in a *salon*; and yet one must be presentable."

The Centaur, who knew nothing more flattering than this cognomen, said :

“Who rides well presents himself everywhere and always well; has ease, strength, prestige, freedom—in short, all which a cavalier needs.”

“Also intellect?”

“Likewise intellect. Horses are clever, shrewd, capricious beasts. They are like women; they must learn to yield—to respond to the slightest command. It requires much intelligence and deep study and prompt decision, to win obedience.”

“Of horses or women?”

“Both! Familiarity with the former is, so to speak, the elementary schooling for understanding the latter.”

“My dear Centaur, I congratulate your future wife.”

“There is time enough. I am still unsettled.”

“Here comes Feldern, with a stranger—probably this Mengen,” interrupted some one.

“So it is!” cried the Centaur. “And I wager he is an excellent horseman.”

By the side of the small, blonde, neat Feldern, with the white hand of a woman and the frank smile of a maiden of fourteen, walked a tall, slight man—straight, dark and firm as a fir-tree. Count Mengen was somewhat cold and distant in carriage

and manners, with a patrician indifference which in no sense savored of self-consciousness. His eyes redeemed his person from over-much seriousness. They were full of light. He could undoubtedly unbend.

Feldern made him acquainted with the young men. Some received him with curiosity, and some without interest, as an intruder into their coterie.

Mario Mengen permitted them to continue their gossip, their smoking and yawning; sat down with folded arms and looked out at the landscape.

"There is the Countess Obernau sketching," said Feldern, suddenly.

"Where, then, is Audlau?" asked one of the group. "For nearly an hour she has been alone. I wonder he allows it."

"That he supports it!" cried another.

"Well, well," said Feldern, "they are not soldered to one another."

"Do not you believe, Feldern, that they are secretly married?"

"No; because they might be so openly, if they wished."

"Who knows; there may be some obstacle."

"For example, the obstinate little head of the Countess Faustine herself, who, for the sake of being different from others, would suffer quietly a

thousand martyrdoms without confessing to herself that they were martyrdoms."

"She has certainly individuality," said Feldern.

"One instance struck me," replied the other: "She wore the whole winter, to all *soirées*, nothing but white."

"To *all soirées*? Why, she so rarely goes into the world!"

"That may be; but when she did appear, she wore white always. At first it was very well to wear the same thing. In Italy there is a custom of dedicating children to the Madonna, and dressing them in her color for a year or more, according to the vow. I asked the countess if she had so bound herself. 'No,' she replied, 'but it is convenient.' Is that natural for a woman, I ask?"

In the meantime Faustine arose, gave her servant her sketching materials, and took her parasol. Then she stood nearly a minute at the balustrade of the terrace. She wore a very simple white percale dress—no colored ribbon, no bow, no wrap, broke the harmonious impression produced by her graceful figure. A wide hat hid her hair—nearly her face. She turned slowly. One felt that the branches, which seemed only a roof for others, were a temple for her. She walked with the gait of a queen in

passing the gentlemen, whom she greeted with friendliness.

“Who is that lady?” asked Count Mengen.

“No one less than Countess Obernau, of whom we were speaking.”

“A stranger?”

“Yes; residing here, however, for some years.”

“Married?”

“Has been”—“Perhaps”—“No one knows”—“Widow”—“Unmarried”—came from every side.

“You are joking,” said Mengen, bewildered.

“On our honor, what we say is truth.”

“The truest and simplest answer,” said Feldern, “is that Countess Obernau is a widow.”

“You know her?” asked Mengen.

“Very well.”

“Is she attractive? May I know her? I suppose so many questions must be pardoned from a stranger,” he continued, laughing.

“About this lady”—another taking up the subject—“one might ask two hundred questions, and every one would give a different answer, as there is a field for all manner of conjecture. But we can spare ourselves the trouble.”

“When are you to be presented to the king, Count Mengen?” asked some one.

“I think Sunday, when he arrives from Pillnitz.”

"Does the court at Vienna do much for society?"

"Very little. Society pays its homage, and is repaid by two court balls."

"Were the races good this year, and whose horse was the victor?" asked the Centaur.

"I think it was Lichtenstein's."

"You are not certain? I hope, Count Mengen, that you are a lover of horses?"

"Oh, yes," said Mengen, bored, "but not of talking about them. As soon as I have my horses here, I intend to explore the country."

"Count Mengen," cried the Centaur, with overflowing heart, "I *thought* so the first moment I saw you! I am delighted that my first impressions were correct."

All united in a laugh at the Centaur's keenness of penetration. Mengen arose.

"It is my minister's dinner hour, and I am expected," he said.

"Now, Feldern," they all cried, looking after the stranger's retreating figure, "tell us all about him!"

"Good heavens," said Feldern, "there is nothing special to be told! He was educated for and follows the career of diplomacy, like any one else, in the usual way. I don't even know if he is rich. In Göttingen, sometimes he had money and sometimes not: but he always seemed to possess gold-mines

and despise them. Once a prince came and set the fashion of costly canes ; we all had to procure them. Mengen's funds being low, he had none. He said at the table : ' Bah, who wants to play the drum-major, and have a stick with a shining knob ? ' It seemed to us, then and there that we were all dubbed drum-majors. The superb canes disappeared."

" We shall see if the secretary of legation will hold the supremacy here that he did in college."

" He would like it."

" I don't believe it," said Feldern. " All he wants is an independent position and to be his own master."

" If he looks for advancement he must marry the daughter of the minister. There is no other way in our day."

" Ah, yes ; discretion rules the world," Feldern sighed.

" Too much is an impediment sometimes," cried another.

" I don't think so," replied Feldern. " Discretion is the track on which society runs its carriage, without jars and without accident."

" Ah, but there are large wheeled carriages which cannot be made to run in a narrow groove," protested some one.

Feldern yawned. The cigars were smoked; the glasses emptied; the conversation languished. Every one went his way—some to their siesta.

* * * * *

In the home of Faustine silence reigned. It was situated near the promenade. No sound of carriages, no stamping of horses, no cries of market-women reached it; nothing to remind one of active life. The windows of the *salon*—long glass doors which led out to the balcony—were open and the *jalousies* closed, so that the bright light was excluded, not the air.

On an ottoman sat Baron Audlau, inattentively fluttering the leaves of a book. Nothing in this world is more distressing than the expectation even of trifles. From the moment one begins to wait, notwithstanding all one's breadth of vision, one becomes like the marksman, who sees and knows on the whole earth's surface nothing but the small black point at the target center. Audlau was very impatient.

"Why does she not come?" he asked himself. "Has anything happened to her? Why did I allow her to be out in this torrid heat?"

He arose restlessly, to go in search of her, when he heard her step on the stairs, and sprang to open the door for her.



SHE WAS ABSORBED IN HER WORK.—*See Page 8.*

The darkness became light as she entered. Faustine threw her hat on one table, her album on another, herself on a lounge, and said :

“ Dear Max, that will make a pretty picture ; but I am tired—tired to death !”

“ Why do you work so hard ? Must the picture be illumined by such an ardent sunshine ?”

“ Quite necessary !” she said. “ And now I have already rested ; and to-night you must take me over to Neustadt ! I want to impress upon my mind the effect of the moon upon the river and churches. That will be the companion picture.”

“ Here is a letter for you,” said Audlau, and took one from the desk. “ I should judge, by the crest, from your brother-in-law.”

“ Ah !” said Faustine.

“ ‘ Dear Sister,’ she read, ‘ we see from your letter of the 24th that you will give us the pleasure of your company in the course of the month of June. As our youngest boy is to be baptized in our church at Oberwaldorf, we beg you to be his godmother. The other sponsors will be the Baroness von Feldkirch *née* Hagen, of Mühlkof, and my brother Clemens, who is with us, having completed his course at Würtsberg. Our children are all well and happy, for which we are grateful. My dear wife is also well, for which God be thanked. She sends loving messages. Your affectionate brother and obedient servant,

“ ‘ KARL VON WALDORF.’ ”

“ Very well,” said Faustine ; “ two days sooner or later can make no difference to you. Let us

travel the day after to-morrow as far as Coburg together ; then you to Kissengen, I to Oberwaldorf, and in the beginning of July perhaps we may meet in Belgium."

Audlau made no comment. He was content with whatever pleased her ; and as she generally cared for nothing and no one in the world except for himself, one cannot but accord him infinite credit for this contentment, men in general being the most exacting where the most considered.

"It will only be from four to five weeks that we shall not see each other," said Faustine ; "but Max, I am sad as if it were so many years. One cannot calculate by the length of time or the breadth of distance. During these days in which I neither see nor hear from you, I may die as well as if forever apart. Is the desire to meet again, do you think, an omen of meeting?"

"Certainly, Faustine ! Nothing can separate us but our own wills."

"Oh, yes," she said, with sadness.

"Yes," cried he vehemently. "Yes, if you believe this we are already parted."

"Death," she said, "waits on no man's pleasure. It takes its own time."

"Oh, death, Faustine !— You will not die. And if I die !—"

“I will come to you. You are right, Max; that is no death, and no separation!”

She had seated herself near him on the ottoman, and laid her soft, fresh, blooming cheek against his shoulder, and her clasped fingers in his left hand. He touched her forehead gently with his lips, and looked at her with an ineffable expression of tenderness, devotion and pleasure.

He had a face with clear-cut features, with lines of strong passion and of earnest thought. When his blue eyes fell on Faustine their gravity was dispelled as none would have believed possible, for his dark heavy eyebrows and black hair, which fell somewhat low upon his forehead, gave him an aspect of unusual severity. It was only Faustine who had seen him smile with his inner delight. For her he was everything that she needed always—father and friend, teacher and lover. Smiling or warning, censuring or chaffing, anxious or loving, she leaned upon him as upon her visible destiny. Her vagrant fancies were kept in bounds by his cool judgment; her nervous sensitiveness by his calm. Sometimes she felt herself frightened under the influence of superiority which such characters always possess over those who are impulsive.

“Oriental slaves, as a sign of their servitude, wear on their wrists a little gold chain, which looks

like an ornament. So your love is an ornament, but still a chain," she would say.

"Which you require, to prevent you from fluttering to the four winds," Audlau would reply.

"And I don't deserve to be better treated," she would say, "because I have a real slave's nature, and love there the most where I am the most tyrannized over. I could never appreciate a love that was not exacting. I don't understand being willing and satisfied that the beloved one should have pleasures unshared and walk in paths where one cannot follow. I think love is naturally selfish, and if one tries to elevate it too much, it ceases to be love at all. It is lost. Pray, what remains to indifference? Love must be exclusive."

If Faustine did not dispute Audlau's wisdom often, but yielded to his stronger opinions, it was because she knew herself to be governed by moods, caprices and imagination; dangerous guides even to the purest natures. Faustine possessed such a nature, although there were those who judged her to be unstable.

"If I could only fathom duty," she often said, "I would so willingly make it my law; but every person has his own principles, and some such very odd ones. One says: 'I rise every morning at six—that is *my* principle.' Another: 'I educate my children

by the rod—that is *my* principle.’ A third : ‘I let the world talk as it pleases ; I don’t trouble myself, but do as I like—that is *my* principle.’ With the latter I am certainly quite in sympathy ; only I don’t entirely understand why such a natural course of thought and action should be dignified with the pompous word ‘principle.’”

“Principles are not intended to run counter to nature,” said Audlau.

“They make people hard and unbending !” cried Faustine.

“Where they are wanting, there is lightness,” said Audlau, smilingly.

“If I make up my mind to walk to a certain spot, why not avoid the dust and stones of the *chaussée*, and keep to the fields to reach my destination ? I come there more agreeably.”

“Because you get your pretty feet wet in the dew, and take a cold ; or a broad ditch stops your way, and you must return ; or a butterfly entices you to wander ; or you arrive one minute late, and that one is too late.”

“I have one principle,” said Faustine seriously.

“And that is ?”

“Not to dispute with you, as I am always worsted, which is very humiliating.”



CHAPTER II.

People had always found Faustine's charm a difficult one to define.

It was like the soft, downy bloom upon freshly plucked fruits. This is a breath—a fragrance—nothing else; but when the fruit has stood in a room twelve hours this lovely nothing has vanished, and once missed it is understood.

Notwithstanding the disillusionments and discouragements of bitter experience, Faustine, in soul, in body, in mind, had remained young and fresh as if she had never suffered. She was not easily influenced. She looked neither to the right nor to the left where others walked. She went untroubled on her own way. This gave her assurance. She never wandered hither and thither in quest of love and friendship. She was quite content in herself. But if any one met her and gave her his hand, she

could give hers in return—heartily and with warmth. Those who did not so meet her half way—those from whom she could draw no support she would allow to pass, unheeding, careless, as one might let fall a withered flower—not throwing it away, but simply letting it drop from one's palm.

“Everything is easy enough to genius,” she would say; “but we who are not geniuses must help ourselves.”

She did not try to win or lead people much into her own plans; probably because it would have been difficult for her to plan anything except a journey or a walk; people served her only as studies or as teachers.

“One bird sings, the other catches gnats, and everything has its nature,” she would say. And every nature was to her interesting; sometimes, however, only for a few minutes.

“Is that my fault?” she would reply to Audlau's reproaches that she was so easily disgusted, and was yawning to-day, where yesterday she applauded. “I have never found weariness with my God or my love.”

Women generally liked Faustine. She entered into no positive rivalry with them. She never gossiped about them, and she never grudged them their triumphs, their beautiful dresses or their

lovers. If she threw the loveliest into shade, they did not always suspect it. The beautiful ones said : "She is very clever ; but beautiful she is not." The clever said : "She has not much understanding, but she is fascinating." None compared themselves with her, any more than cultivated plants would with an Alpine flower.

Ordinary men found little pleasure in Faustine's society. Such do not easily pardon a woman who makes them feel themselves insignificant and unimportant. She was too impatient of the nonsense which makes the *point de départ* of their conversation with women, and she had little indulgence for tediousness. *Ennui* painted itself so distinctly on her transparent face, that it would have been more than audacious to pursue what produced such unflattering effects ; consequently many men had nothing to say to her. This is one reason why her own sex sometimes forgive to a woman her superiority. She pleased elderly people better than the young ; first, because she was more affable with them, and then she respected age, and liked to feel herself in less danger of disturbing enthusiasms.

Without great wealth, *éclat* or intrigue, she was accepted through the power of her graceful personality, and the constant devotion to her of Baron Audlau was looked upon with indulgence. There

were those, indeed, who had said that there existed a secret marriage. But this was a mere rumor, repudiated by her friends.

Faustine and her sister Adèle, early left orphans, and quite poor, were educated by a sister of their dead father. She paid their pension at school, and gave herself no further anxiety concerning them until they were grown up; then she took them to her own house, and set about providing them with husbands—less through interest for the maidens than because she did not like her own somewhat faded beauty cast into the shade by their freshness. Two young men who visited at her house seemed such desirable nephews that she decided they must become such. Count Obernau, a wild young officer, who had no ideas beyond his horse, his wine and his pipe; Karl von Waldorf, a young land-owner, strong and stalwart, with no manners, but with a certain charm of honor and bravery. Waldorf was not rich, but Obernau had large wealth.

“He is such a very solid man,” the aunt would say of Waldorf to Adèle. “Obernau is a bit wild and a spendthrift,” she would say to Faustine; “but you will guide him to make better use of his fortune.”

Adèle, practical from childhood, saw no sweeter future than to have her own home and be busy from

morning till night in housekeeping duties. A man must necessarily place her in this Eldorado.

The aunt entertained Waldorf with Adèle's remarkable capabilities.

"She must be a first-rate girl," he would say to himself.

"Do you like cherries?" he asked her one day as they sat under a tree eating the ripe fruit.

"Very much indeed," replied Adèle.

"In Oberwaldorf there are excellent ones," replied Waldorf.

"So my aunt tells me."

"Really, now, would you like to taste them?"

"There are good ones here," answered Adèle evasively.

"Come and eat those at Oberwaldorf, *fräulein* ; and if you like them well enough, remain there as my *châtelaine*."

So, half in joke, half in earnest, Adèle was won.

"Are you then happy, dear little Adèle?" asked Faustine as she fastened the orange-blossoms in her sister's hair the morning of her marriage.

"Oh, very !" cried Adèle, clasping her hands.

"And about what the most?"

"Oh, about everything ; but especially that I am to have a house of my own."

"It will be a trouble."

“But a greater pleasure; and then—I can leave my aunt.”

“That is certainly good fortune,” said Faustine.

“And I shall be a married woman; and then, of course, most of all, that Waldorf is to be my husband.”

“Notwithstanding that he wakes the walls when he laughs and leaves a red mark where he kisses?”

“A red mark!” cried Adèle, shocked, and hastening to the mirror.

As she found no mar, however, on the beauty of her blooming complexion, she sat down consoled.

“It passes—Ini.”

Waldorf and Adèle were and remained a happy couple in their own fashion.

“Do you know your brother-in-law’s brother?” asked Audlau of Faustine.

“Young Clemens? Yes; years ago I saw him at Waldorf—a boy at that time, already as big as a giant; but such a child that I am still inclined to call him ‘little Clemens.’ I am glad he will be there; he may have grown a little more civilized; perhaps very agreeable; and that sort of thing is always useful, particularly in such a dull place.”

“If you think so, you need not say it, Ini,” said Audlau, piqued.

“But I am really delighted that I am to meet

Clemens there. And give me the pleasure," she continued, "of being a trifle jealous. You have now an excellent opportunity. I should like to contemplate you in that attitude and see how I would conduct myself."

"You know, Faustine, there can be no question of jealousy with me, because I admit of no rival. A thing on which another has laid his hands he may take."

"I know you are a hard man."

"But not to you."

"Oh, but yes, to me. You are like a rock to which I cling—a poor little growth. The rock remains unchanged, and I don't even know if he likes it."

In saying this her eyes were brimming with tears.

"You wound me, Ini," said Audlau, with profound tenderness. "You know so well that you are my only happiness, that you trifle with me. It would be just as childish for you to doubt me as for me to repeat it to you every moment."

"Doubt would certainly give me cause for thought," said the young woman, dreamily.

"And what kind of thought—tormenting or pleasant?" he said teasingly.

"I would seem to myself like the eiderduck."

"That is not a very flattering comparison," laughed he.

“No, not for men ; for he plucks his own feathers to warm the eggs of chalk which are put into his nest ; men rob his nest of the white down to make soft cushions for themselves, and untiringly the poor bird plucks himself bare for those eggs which he cannot warm.”

“And what resemblance?” asked Audlau, somewhat surprised.

“What I have of loving tenderness in my heart I cast without thought before you, happy enough that you accept it. What else should I do with it? But you—you take the soft white down expressly that I may tell you over and over again, in some new fashion, how I love you.”

“If you believe that of me, punish me, and think of no new ways.”

“I must,” she said.

“You know, Faustine, we cannot change our natures. You must breathe out the fullness, the glow, the splendor of yours in word and expression. I have no eloquence, but must worship you silently. Do you call that a want of sympathy and of love?”

“No, no, I already told you. Max, I do not allow these thoughts to take shape.”

“It would, indeed, be a pity,” he said earnestly, “that your clear and shining soul should be dark-

ened by doubt and torment. Thou art a child of the light, my Ini."

"The children of the world are wiser than the children of light, the Bible says."

"It did not occur to me to quote your wisdom just now," said Audlau, laughing.

"You are my wisdom ; I want none of my own," she answered, and pressed her forehead against his shoulder. Her hair fell gracefully over her face ; the slight white form rested peacefully in his arms.

These two people lived in the world as if upon a rock rising for them in the middle of the sea. If Faustine sometimes complained of Audlau's reserve, it was as the tone of pain in the nightingale's song, in whose complaint there lurks an ineffable longing. Faustine had one of those souls of fire which in every moment of life craves to have and drain the nectar goblet of joy, without stint and without satiety. If Audlau was not of the same temperament, yet he could at least always reach the height of her sentiment.

On this evening, as she walked to the Neustadt upon his arm, to study the moonlight upon the water, she stopped on the bridge and spoke to him :

"Max, I must remember that song of incantation of the old Thessalian conjurers which could bring the moon down to the earth. It has secrets that I

would like to fathom. It touches one as coldly as the finger of death."

"Leave the moon in its sphere and draw your shawl around you, Ini."

"And I think if I had it very near me—as it were, face to face—its light would be less corpse-like. Its beauty makes one regret its coldness, which is surely a great fault."

"Especially here, on the bridge, draw up your shawl; the air blows cold over the Elbe."

"I will, dear Max. How I would like to know if stars have a real and enigmatical influence upon our destinies, and if the star that shone upon our birth remains our friend and stays with us?"

"Astrologers gave themselves trouble enough to discover that in old times; but the sharp analysis and material industries of our day have dissipated all these misty follies. To me it seems healthier to believe that we ourselves solve and influence our own destinies."

"It may be a mistake, and yet I always fancied that the sun takes an interest in me, because I was born in his day of majesty, the twenty-second of June. Life is only a joy to me when the sun shines. In summer I always imagine no unhappiness, no evil can come to me. The sun smiles upon me. Is he not the eye of God? Oh, Max, I do right to love

the heavenly sun who prepare pleasures for us like a good mother!"

"I told you already to-day you were a child of the light."

"Ah! But of the storm, Max, too; for in the tempest, between the thunder and the lightning, was I born. That is why storms cannot harm me. They break over my head; they sweep over my hair and my dress; I fold my arms crosswise on my breast, and bow my head, and let them play. I always seem to hear in them the voice of the Eternal, and even the thunder never frightens me. Really, I have not the smallest physical terror when it rolls on the high mountains. I imagine the great spirits are coming down from their homes to tread our poor little earth with resounding feet, as an old warrior in armor a shepherd's hut. And oh, the lightnings! They are made for me! They kiss and clasp me! They are my girdle and my crown and my lance. Oh, the lightning has much to say to me! It can neither kill nor blind me; for when I first opened my eyes, I saw it and did not die or lose my sight. I understand all these things, but I do not understand the moon."

"But I do, Ini. For it speaks a very unpoetical tongue which is very clear. Its cold rays are to guide people to hurry home in the evening, and not

to linger on the Elbe bridge, where little goblins tumble about and breathe their icy breath upon us. They hurt you, and you do not even suspect their presence. I must keep watch for you."

"Oh, you are good!" she said, and seized his hand.

He took her to her house and then sought his own.





CHAPTER III.

Two days later Mengen was saying to Feldern on the Terrace :

“By the by, you were to introduce me to the beautiful white statue, whom I saw drawing here yesterday, Countess— What is her name?”

“Oberнау. Oh, she’s no statue! Unfortunately she left this morning for several months,” replied Feldern.

“What a pity! Some people are so interesting that one would climb mountains to see them once thoroughly, look in their faces; and this done, one never forgets them.”

“Your ambassador, I hear, will bring his wife and daughter from the baths. Is the young girl pretty?”

“Very pretty, judging from her portrait; but too young to make any impression.”

“And the mother?”

“Not young enough.”

“Diplomatic life must be very pleasant. It seems the key to every circle; to finding a home everywhere, yet has neither ties nor cares.”

“I see no advantage to our career, except that our chief can spy our every action. I am sick to death of the whole thing! If Cæsar had not been celebrated through his life and death, he would have been so through his *mot* with regard to being first.”

“At least, you have great chances of advancement, and are not cooped up in some wretched village, but are sent to large cities.”

“You are engaged to be married, I have heard,” said Mengen.

“I have been—for four years.”

“What patience, my dear Feldern! And does your *fiancée* live here?”

“In the neighborhood, in the country. You will know her.”

“I, too, would like to marry.”

“And are you engaged?”

“No,” said Mario, laughing; “and certainly not for four years. No woman has yet inspired me with the desire; but sometimes in the superficial whirl of things, I feel I should like a place of repose. Would like to prove if there really is any other hap-

piness than that derived from ambition and vanity ; anything that satisfies, even for a moment. Of course, one wants a lasting and unswerving happiness ; and this a woman ought to give, but I have not yet seen her."

"You make large demands."

"None at all ; I only expect that we should accord."

"A modest aspiration," said Feldern, laughing.





CHAPTER IV.

Oberwaldorf was all excitement. A christening and a week of guests was a sensation for a quiet house. To-day Faustine was expected. To-morrow the baptism was to take place.

Adèle, a very pretty, stout, little lady, moved with unceasing energy about the house, giving the last directions to her servants, like a general to his regiment before battle. Her children raced after her with absolute want of discipline. She had never been able to enforce obedience, notwithstanding her love of order. Their father considered punishment a cruelty, and only lost his patience with them when they invaded his study. The greatest anger of his life had perhaps been when once his four-year-old daughter had climbed on a stool and drawn down upon herself all his best volumes. His wrath upon this occasion had become traditional with the chil-

dren, so that they would have bearded a lion in his den sooner than disturb him in his library.

"Come down now, children," said Adèle, as she tripped into the room prepared for Faustine, making her last round of the guest-chambers; but they were hidden behind the silk quilt of the bed, playing hide-and-seek, all five romping, screaming and hot, having in fact a delightful frolic, not much to their mother's taste. It made her heart sick to see them treading her beautiful silk coverlid with their little leather boots.

Having called out silence and order several times without effect, she finally had recourse to stratagem.

"A carriage! The aunt arrives!" she cried out suddenly, and hurried from the room. The children sprang after her downstairs, and Adèle had won.

At last Faustine did come. She had parted that day from Audlau, and the sense of her isolation lay heavily upon her. One so seldom feels at home in the family of a sister. No matter how dear a brother or sister may be to us, the brother-in-law, the sister-in-law, their parents, their cousins—are so many strange elements; oftener repellent than attractive, and yet claiming a regard and friendship which can only spring from natural inclination.

As Faustine approached the end of her journey,

she tried to shake off the sadness that oppressed her.

Oberwaldorf was situated at the entrance to the valley through which ran a wild wood stream, that below lost itself in the river Main, and higher up turned a saw-mill. The houses lay between fresh gardens, behind them were stretched luxuriant fields and meadows. The mountains that encircled the valley were decked with brush-wood and myrtle. It was not a grand, but a healthful, lovely prospect. The manor, politely termed the "Castle," rose in the center of its grounds, shaded by elms. Old-fashioned and without pretension, it had even a certain neglected air. The arms over the entrance hall were dilapidated. The artistic sculptures of the bay-window were crumbling, and no water flowed from the urn which a broken Triton held over the basin in the court-yard.

The whole family surrounded Faustine, and one could not hear a word for the loud jubilee. Two children climbed into the carriage and ordered the postilion to drive them around the court, at which request he did not seem overpleased. They consoled themselves for his lack of enthusiasm by helping him to unpack.

"Do you remember me?" asked finally a sonorous voice behind Faustine.

"Very well," she was going to say, and turned to look at the speaker, but was alarmed to find a tall man, bearded like Jupiter Olympus, looking down upon her.

"I am little Clemens," said the giant, with a smile of amusement, at her surprise, in his friendly eyes.

"It is quite conceivable that you do not know this little fellow," said Waldorf, with a loud laugh. "He looks like the wild man of the Harz Mountains. He was always a chip-of-the-old-block—straight and unbending in body and mind."

"I like that," said Faustine, with the lovely smile which Clemens remembered four years before.

"You look just the same," said Clemens.

"That also gives me pleasure."

"Will you not take something, Ini?" asked Adèle. "You must be hungry, all day in a carriage—fatiguing, was it not?"

"Neither hungry nor tired, Adèle."

"We must have supper earlier."

"Not on my account, I thank you a thousand times; and will thank you two thousand times more if you treat me absolutely without ceremony. I never was shy, and shall ask for what I want, if you will permit."

"That is clever," said Waldorf. "Hosts and

guests must be *sans gêne*. Before I forget, what name will you give your little god-child?"

"Why, the one you desire, my good Waldorf."

"Oh, no; the sponsors name the child; that is the proper way."

"I thought that had gone out of fashion."

"It may be, and that is why we like it."

"Would you then like 'Faustus' or 'Faustin' for your son?" she asked, laughing.

"No, I should not; I don't care for the romantic—suggestive of robbers and ghost stories. Yet I would like to honor you. Have you no favorite name?"

"Oh, yes, Maximilian. May his long name bring him good luck, poor baby."

The children surrounded Faustine, quiet as little mice—half bewildered and frightened, with fingers in their mouths, pulling their buttons, staring at her with wild eyes.

"Will you not go to bed, little ones?" asked Adèle.

There was immediately a noisy good-night kissing; their aunt was still too much of a stranger for them to venture remonstrances before her.



CHAPTER V.

The christening passed with much excitement, but with weariness unutterable for at least one person. Faustine detested festivities that had been preparing for weeks.

“They have always a bitter-sweet taste,” she would say, “for all the annoyances, troubles and plagues the party-givers have endured.”

After the great day, she lived in her own fashion ; disturbed no one—did not allow herself to be disturbed ; read, drew and walked.

Adèle could not understand what pleasure one could derive from walking. She went into the garden to look at the cherry-trees or at the potatoes, to assure herself they were doing well ; otherwise her foot never crossed the threshold of her house.

Waldorf, like most men whose occupations lead

them much out-of-doors, thought a walk an enormous waste of time. Men who lead sedentary lives take them at stated times, like a dose of medicine.

Very humiliating this for the lovers of free, aimless walks, which only discover their hidden charms to those who so enjoy them. One cannot subject an agreeable walk to rules. No recipe can assure it, and society is superfluous. One must either be alone or with a congenial spirit. In such companionship there is but one.

Clemens sometimes accompanied Faustine, to draw her attention to a fine view, a splendid tree or lost foot-path among the hills. By and by, he went with her every day. When Adèle sat working in the garden at evening, and Waldorf paced in front of the house, slowly with his pipe, Faustine would engage Clemens, after a quarter of an hour of this tiresome parade, to start for a longer one.

He was a nice fellow—gentle in character, as colossal men often are; nature giving them a kind soul to counteract the strength which would otherwise tend to brutality. It is exceptional that such men are swaggerers or disturbers of the peace. Small men, who must crane their necks that one may see them, are the aggressive ones. Equalizing nature, too, has often breathed into these diminutive figures a strong spirit or a great genius.

Clemens's boyish, half-awakened mind, had four years ago felt drawn toward Faustine. His brother and sister-in-law did but little to improve him ; but he lost something of his angular shyness near the graceful woman, who seemed to like to chat and laugh with the awkward young fellow, or talk to him with gentle gravity. For this he was forever grateful to her. Meeting her at that moment of life when beginning to look at things less childishly, he believed her to be the cause of this new light, and he attributed the strange earnestness of his sensations to her sweet and serious influence. Every time he came to visit his brother, he secretly hoped to find Faustine at Oberwaldorf—always in vain ! But there lingered in him such a longing, as one feels in the winter, for the long-delayed spring. Hard work—activity of any kind—two years of study—two months, even—will have much power to quell the wanderings of imagination, and act like water on fire, to bring back a young head into the right rut.

Clemens in no wise fancied that he loved Faustine, but only held her as the most attractive creature he had ever seen, and kept her image fresh. And now she was just the same as before.

She never willingly took a step forward which she must later retrace. She often did take steps which

were venturesome, and once taken, she stood fast, and said to herself: "No cowardice! Ever forward! Who have supple limbs must spring and climb." That applied to herself. She did not ask to be followed. On the contrary, she had a fine tact for others—that her own steps should not entangle theirs—or at least she thought so.





CHAPTER VI.

One morning as she started for a walk she found Clemens under the elms of the courtyard.

"Can I accompany you?" asked he.

"Thank you; in the morning I do not need you," she said.

"Cannot you make me of some use?" he insisted.

"No," she answered naively; "in the morning I do not go far enough to lose myself; it is too warm; and then it is broad day. In the evening I am afraid the darkness may overtake me, and then, you know, I need a protector." She nodded to him cordially, and went on.

This was quite true; and, on the other hand, she thought it might disturb his occupations.

"I dislike to disturb people," she added inwardly. "Max, I cannot disturb. He lives for me; he can walk with me from morning till night; Clemens—no, Clemens must not neglect something better."

But Clemens was not too pleased with this consideration and said to her one evening :

“Don’t grudge me a few hours of your companionship for these two or three short days will pass here.”

“You must not contract too violent a taste for my vagabond kind of existence,” she replied, deprecatingly.

“Ah ! When you have left us the everyday routine will reassert its rights quickly enough.”

“Men’s prudence is certainly extraordinary,” cried Faustine, merrily. “It protects them always from wandering a hairsbreadth farther than they have intended.”

“Do you not approve ?” asked he, earnestly.

“I approve everything which does good to others, if it doesn’t hurt me,” replied she, laughingly.

“And if it hurts you ?”

“Then I will not be judge any more ; I cannot sit, like Brutus, in judgment over my son and take his life. In place of a son I have my inclinations and opinions. Through them I am vulnerable.”

“Will such strong measures really be necessary, if they prove traitors, to uproot them ?”

“Perhaps not ; but our whole being, after all, consists in the significance which we give to things. When I give up my opinion, I confess that instead

of a straight tree I have reared up a crooked one ; it must be cut down. Where I found lovely shadows I find a waste ; where rustling leaves, a silent, dead place. Oh, I can understand that to give up one's opinion might be death !”

“ Wouldn't the consciousness of a better knowledge save us from despair ?”

“ Between this consciousness and despair, one still dies. George Foster died of grief—of a broken heart—when the French Revolution took a turn which did not agree with his opinions.”

“ George Foster was an enthusiast, whose soul would have consumed him, even if his hopes in the Revolution had been realized.”

“ Yes, *mon ami* ; something hotter than fish-blood was in him. He was not of the kind that die of old age. But another George—no enthusiast in the sense in which you use the word—named von Freundsberg, was stricken with paralysis when at the taking of Rome the demoralized soldiery refused to obey his orders.”

“ Don't you think he would have done much better to have devised some means of regaining his influence than to vex himself to death about its loss ?”

“ He saw that his time was up, and so he died ; as Charles V. abdicated his crown when he found that he could no longer really govern. He would not be

a figurehead monarch, nor Freundsberg a figurehead commander. You see they had a high opinion of their dignity."

"You are terribly learned with all your historical instances."

"They give more emphasis than speaking about ourselves."

Clemens, in walking, had picked a great bunch of wood and meadow flowers.

"It is splendid," said Faustine; "but I cannot possibly burden myself."

So he carried it very patiently, and she only took it now and then and pressed her face into it, to inhale its freshness and fragrance. In an hour the flowers were faded, lifeless, broken things; wild flowers fade so quickly.

"Don't carry them any longer," said Faustine. Clemens gave them into her hands; she threw them away.

"Oh!" he cried out, a little mournfully, and stood still.

"My dear fellow, I must have my hands free to use when I walk; that you knew long ago."

"But I would have liked to carry them for you."

"They were good for nothing now. Flowers are only beautiful as long as they are in contact with

the earth. In five minutes they smell of death. I never pick flowers,”

“But these *were* picked.”

“Then we will give them to the element which will be the best for their present condition,” said Faustine, lightly. She turned round, seized up the bouquet and threw it in the brook, which carried it away quickly over its stones.

“The quiet flowers had not dreamed of such a dance ; I wonder does it amuse them ?” she said.

“You are very cruel, countess.”

“And you amusingly sentimental.”

“Why do you grudge me the flowers ?”

“Is it on their account you are lamenting ?” and Faustine laughed heartily. “It seems to me you fret a great deal about them. Did you mean to make a *sachet* of them ? I can scarcely fancy you intended to keep them as a souvenir of our walk.”

“Why not, may I ask ?” said Clemens, somewhat piqued.

“Because it is not important enough ; we have not discussed sufficiently interesting subjects.”

“I regret that—for you. To me everything you speak of is interesting.”

“That is so nice—to find interest in everything.”

“In no way my case ; only everything that you say.”

“As Socrates sat listening at the feet of Diotima. So really you think that there is no disgrace if a man believes that he can profit by a woman’s companionship?” she said, with mock gravity. “Unhappily I am not clever or wise.”

“Oh !” said Clemens. But Faustine interrupted him quickly :

“In common phrase, I am quite clever enough for myself, perhaps ; but for others certainly not. No one must go to school to me. The practical grasping side of life is insupportable to me ; and men are put here for that. Who doesn’t work like a steam-engine is worthless. Who can sit longest at his desk writing without liver-complaint, or command the loudest without lung disease, never allowing the eyes to wander or the patience to flag—he will ‘amount to something,’ as they say. Now I believe one can do just as well out of the rank and file. I should revolt—become a deserter and run away. And you know that is disgraceful and, as advice, very bad.”

“Ah, countess,” murmured Clemens, very low ; “you are indescribably fascinating.”

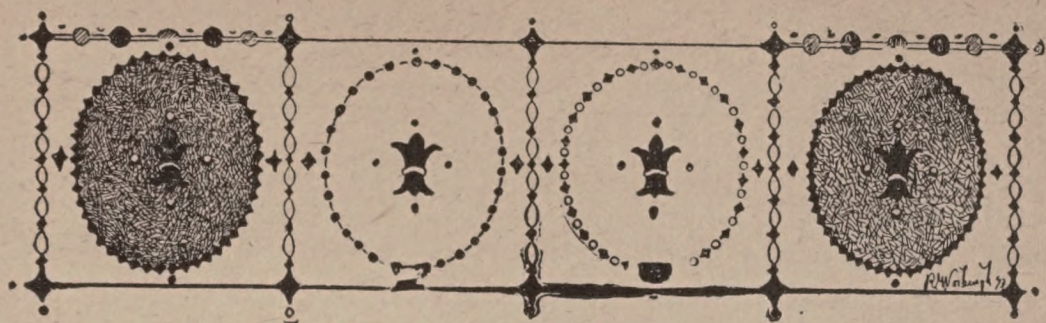
“Really? Fascination is always indescribable,” she laughed ; “it is well you didn’t attempt to describe it in words.”

“Yes ; this one feels near you. Do not take what

I say amiss; one shouldn't pay compliments, I know; I would not for the world say anything you do not like."

Faustine suddenly let the conversation drop.





CHAPTER VII.

That night she wrote to Audlau :

“Max, I am sad ! The days pass like water through my fingers ; nothing remains of them. One does not live here ; at the best one only dreams, and I love to *live* ! The only thing I fear is to die without having seen and known all. ‘What?’ you will ask. Everything, dear love—past, present, future. Yes, the future. Why cannot we judge of it as the physician takes the diagnosis of a case in illness? To be sure, we have not all the discernment of a physician, and all physicians are not clever and successful. So—I must console myself. But the longing remains. I look with astonishment at people who have no such sentiments. Sometimes I envy them, and think it is fullness of happiness which makes them indifferent to what lies beyond. But when I reflect I see well that limited views suit limited vision, and I cease to marvel. If I should say to my brother-in-law : ‘Ah, how I would like to know the future !’ he would reply : ‘There is a fortune-teller in the village ; but do you believe such nonsense?’ He is very good—my brother-in-law ; practical, sensible, honest, cheats no one ; and my sister is just like him ; they are cut out for one another, and happy in each other. They are all fond of each other here. Had I to finish my life here, it would

be soon over; I should die of *ennui*. Heavens! What do I find to talk about to you? Near you I could be quiet for days and weeks, and never invaded by this soul-deadening weariness. We always find food for thoughts. Here all is action. You know St. Vitus's dance; one feels like imitating its victims. When I see this working and driving from morning till night, I feel as though I must, to my best ability, move my hands and feet as well as the rest. But my limbs were only made for useless tasks. Oh, Max, how I thank you that you like repose in life. Adèle says one learns; but I can only learn what I already know. Adèle leads such a busy life that it leaves me to take refuge with Clemens Waldorf. He is the only one to whom I can speak, and he listens. There is not much in the matter of answers; but, then, no one answers to my taste except yourself. I am longing to hear your answers. I am satiated with reading them. Oh, fatal satiety? Must it creep in everywhere? You will not feel hurt that I prefer your presence to your letters."





CHAPTER VIII.

Clemens was half wounded in his vanity, and half sad at heart that Faustine treated him just as formerly. What had pleased him then did not suffice now.

“Am I still a school-boy in her eyes?” he sometimes asked himself. “Could any man suit her? Oh, I should like her to rest upon my palm like a butterfly!”

Faustine had no idea that Clemens or any other could feel more than good-will toward her. She thought herself too incapable of reciprocity of feeling to gain a deep influence over others, and fancied this conviction must be written upon her brow. “Men,” she thought, “know themselves where they can hope to make at least a slight impression, and they will not play at ‘Love’s Labor Lost.’” Clemens was so friendly with every one—so kindly in word

and act, that had he lacked this friendliness with her she would have marveled. Once, as he played ball untiringly with the children, she said :

“ You have a great deal of heart ; you deserve a nice wife.”

Clemens opened his eyes wide. His brother looked up.

“ Are you thinking of a wife, Clemens ?”

Clemens turned toward his brother, looked at him and remained silent.

“ Why not ?” answered Adèle for him.

“ He is so young ; so inexperienced in farming.”

“ Must love wait for a profound science in farming ?” asked Faustine, laughingly.

“ And you were not much older when we were married,” added Adèle.

“ Women, next to marrying themselves, love nothing so well as marrying others,” said Waldorf, and laughed as loudly as the thunder at his own platitude.

“ I think that is very flattering for you,” said Adèle, irritably.

“ It is generally better to make a match than break one,” said Faustine. “ But what thinks Clemens about this ?”

“ That he has time,” answered the young man, laconically.

"See how well I know my brother," cried Waldorf, triumphant. "He will first train himself thoroughly, then purchase an estate in my neighborhood and establish himself. During that time some pretty Josephine will be growing up for him."

"Allow people to arrange their own affairs," said Clemens, shortly.

"And select a wife to their own taste?" asked Faustine.

"What twaddle, that!" said Waldorf.

"It rather pleases me," cried Faustine, and clapped her hands. "Now I like a man that desires more of his wife than that she will not over-salt his soup."

"If one is too exacting in one's choice, one is rarely happy," remarked Adèle.

"If I had a daughter," said Faustine, "and a man saw in her his future housekeeper, I should be profoundly humiliated."

"You are wrong!" cried Adèle. "Common interests—that is the strongest bond."

"I believe I *am* foolish," replied Faustine, quietly; "and heaven has spared me this trial by giving me no daughter. I never doubted that sorrow and trouble, battled through together, bind hearts to each other. I would make many sacrifices; but should expect my husband to wish to own, not a servant—but me—Faustine."

"I am amazed," said Waldorf, and let fall his pipe.

"At my peculiar ideas?" asked she, a little contemptuously.

"No; that you do not marry, you speak of it so reasonably."

Faustine made merry over her brother-in-law's comment:

"Why should I marry? I am too old!"

"Oh," said he, with a bow; "such a beautiful woman will never be old."

"Bravo! You are exercising yourself in gallantry. Since I am young and beautiful enough—perhaps not rich enough."

"That is quite another thing. I was surprised to hear you speak of sacrifices, having heard you say you thought women should be on the same footing with men."

"Would you expect the woman to be the head of the family?" asked Adèle.

"No, I would expect a man to treat his wife as an equal, and not like a bought slave, putting his heel upon her neck in his bad humors, and in his pleasant moments decking it with a necklace. There is nothing like this to demoralize a woman. It destroys her delicacy. To-day she allows a brutality to pass for the sake of a new bonnet to-morrow."

“Clemens,” she said, turning suddenly to the young man; “think of these things when you marry.”

“But you forget his wife is to come from heaven,” put in Waldorf; “he has already told us.”

“I wish you as good a one as you deserve,” she said kindly to Clemens.

“Has she, then, not guessed that for me there is but one woman in the world, and no other?” he asked himself. He was *distract* when he went for a walk with her later, and spoke little. This, however, did not strike Faustine, who knew how much he liked to listen to her. He did not notice where they went; nor did she, as she always relied upon his guidance and preferred unknown paths.

“Where are we?” she asked at last, as they came suddenly out of a wooded place into a swamp skirted by trees, through which a turbid brook flowed slowly. “It is absolutely ghostly here. Must I cross this brook?”

“Certainly,” said Clemens; and without another word he took her up in his arms and carried her across.

When Faustine was once more on *terra firma*—“I forbid that,” she said; “I can use my own feet. Where are we going now?” She spoke angrily and shook her gown as if she would be free from his

touch. She did it thoughtlessly, and just this wounded him deeply. He answered her question:

“I really do not know.”

“Why did you carry me through the brook if it was useless?”

“That, too, I do not know.”

“Then please go and find the way.” She sat down on a stone; Clemens stood immovable near her.

“Are you too tired?” she asked, impatiently.

“No; I wish to ask you something.”

“Why do you hesitate, then? It is very uncomfortable here. Well?”

“Why did you shake your dress as from the contact of some hideous worm?”

“I do not like any one to touch me,” she said, and laughed. “Do not take it amiss; but I really see no cause to be thankful to you for carrying me across the brook.”

“I am very unhappy,” he said.

“Because you have lost the way?”

“No, because I have lost my head.”

“That is very distressing,” said she mockingly. “Perhaps if you first look for the path you will find that, too. I believe it is going to rain.”

Clemens sprang over the brook and disappeared in the wood. Faustine waited. The time seemed

long to her. The twilight lingered, but some dark clouds rolled overhead. She felt timid in this lonely place. She decided to follow the stream without waiting for her companion's return, for a few drops fell. She gathered up her skirts and crossed the meadow to the wood and stood a good quarter of an hour on the road.

"Clemens *has* certainly lost his head," said she. "This is the valley of Oberwaldorf, and this little muddy brook is a surer guide than he, for I think it falls in our well-known mountain torrent. Ah, well, it is better to depend on nature than on men."





CHAPTER IX.

It rained heavily. She did find her way safely back, but thoroughly drenched, to the house, where she amused her astonished sister with her adventure, and made herself merry at Clemens's expense.

"He will be looking for you and worried to death," said Adèle.

"Assuredly he will."

"You really should have waited for him."

"And stayed in that miserable meadow to be rained upon? Thanks! His stupidity deserved this little punishment."

"That is the pleasure of these walks. You will catch cold, and he—"

"Perhaps a cough," said Faustine gayly, "and that is no great misfortune. But I will never walk with him again."

Clemens had intended to return as they had come, but as he had not observed the way they had taken,

he stopped at a woodman's hut and got a child, who was playing at the door, to point out to him the shortest way to the castle. There was some little delay, and returning to the meadow, he found Faustine had gone. Instead of going at once to Oberwaldorf, he wandered about hither and thither in search of her. He met no one who had seen her. He could not believe any evil had befallen her; there were no robbers or dangerous precipices in the neighborhood; but she might have been alarmed, he thought, anxiously, and tore his hair in despair. At last he did what he should have done at first—returned to Oberwaldorf—to send all the inhabitants of castle and village, if necessary, to look for her.

The turret clock struck ten. At this hour the whole castle was usually dark. To-day there were lights in some of the rooms. "She is not there, or they would have gone to their rooms," he thought. He entered the *salon*—she was there—he flew to her—seized her hands—kissed them with mad rapture, and then sank on a stool at her side, unable to speak.

"What did you think?" said Faustine, after he had recovered himself.

"Nothing," he replied, "else I should have thought the truth. My anxiety was too great."

When the next day he proposed a walk—"That is all over," she said; "I have lost faith in you. You left me alone in a swamp."

He entreated and prayed, but Faustine went no more. Her departure was drawing near, and she could not conceal her delight. Clemens was as if stunned. On the last evening, as they were by chance left alone, he took courage.

"If I only knew that you would think of me without annoyance—"

On Faustine's lips dawned a faint smile, which meant: "I don't think of you at all," but she only said, indifferently: "You have done me no harm."

"But that evening in the meadow?"

"Dear Clemens, you cannot think that would really annoy me. Be tranquil; we part—as we met—good friends."

"And does that mean nothing?"

"Not much," said the young woman. "Friends do little enough for one another; but good friends wish each other a happy journey, and then—!"

"Would you not allow me to write to you?"

"Frankly, I would scarcely find time to answer you, so that I think it would be a useless permission."

"You are of an icy, superhuman coldness, countess. You have lived here five weeks so friendly, so



HE TOOK HER IN HIS ARMS AND CARRIED HER ACROSS.—*See Page 59.*

sweetly, that it was a boon to be near you—to see you—to be dazzled by you. And now you go as if all had been a sport or had never been.”

“I go with the same friendliness and interest as when I came. It would be laughable to affect great sorrow. My stay has been very agreeable among dear, good people; but I am also well content to leave, for I am not nor ever should be at home here.”

“And when shall I see you again?”

“Must you then see me again?”

“Yes,” he said.

“If it would help you, but there is no use.”

“You are terrible, Faustine!”

“Am I wrong? Come, we will play a game of chess.”

They played, but Clemens so inattentively that Faustine took his queen.

“The queen is gone; the game is over,” he said, and left the room.

The general leave-taking on the following morning was short and hearty. Clemens took no private one.

Faustine came to Audlau with a jubilate on her lips:

“Now I shall live again!” she said. “When I am away from you, Max, I wander in the valley, al-

ways looking for the exit, always longing for the mountains, thirsty for air, for liberty, for you."

A halo of happiness surrounded her. It almost hurt her that he sought to calm her tumultuous feeling. She was enchantingly beautiful in the storm of her emotions, as are all mortals beautiful who find their element. But he loved her so much that he felt more fear than pleasure, lest the fire of such moments should consume her and she should vanish from him. Love must have solicitude.

"Heaven and I—" Faustine was wont to say, "we must lighten and thunder; but you people, with your lightning-rods, you tire us to death."

"Why do you cry now, Ini?" asked Audlau, during that first hour that found them reunited. "Tears are for sorrow, and I want, when you are with me, that you should be happy, contented, quiet."

"Oh, I am quiet enough," she said, smiling through her tears.

"Then sit near me and tell me everything."

"Sitting down, dear Max, is such a dreadful invention! My thoughts rust if I sit, and that doesn't give calm, but unrest. To-day I am too happy! My soul is like a landscape that the sun lightens as it does the earth, which smokes and glows in its heat as a decked altar. Oh, my Max! I am in a haven of calm—only when you, my sun, shine upon me."

Audlau knelt before her and tried to rest her head on his breast, but she pushed him away.

"Leave me," she said. "Play to me, dear, it is so long since I have heard any music! I would like you to speak to me in music to-day."

Audlau seated himself at the piano. His fingers wandered into a dreamy improvisation. Sometimes he followed the melody of the composer or, again, was carried away upon the fancy of his inspiration, adding something of himself to the cadences of the master, as one marks the best-loved pages of a book.

How mean all other arts seem compared to music! They find their models in nature which they express and idealize—the human form and its action, and the space wherein man moves; fine aims, no doubt, as are all aims which soar above material necessity. But the marble God and painted saint become one of us—go with us hand in hand. Poetry, the natural speech of ingenuous men, gives us back our own thoughts in our own words. Music alone does not beautify only this world and its aspects, but overshadows us with another in which we hover, giving us eyes with which to behold the mysteries of love and faith. How strange that all these sources of delight should spring through some mysterious combination of wood and metal,

breathed forth in numbers weird, penetrating and enticing. Music, like Columbus, discovers a new world to earth—a world in which each seeks his paradise, an Eden to which all have entrance. Savages, children, and the old, either too indifferent or too blunted to appreciate beauties of form and color, find in music hidden sorceries, and the cradle-song and dirge accompany the first and last steps of life.

All this by parenthesis. I only wished to say that all music, from that of Orpheus to the Rat-Catcher, always works wonders. It brought rest to Faustine's heart.





CHAPTER X.

Count Mengen lived very much to himself in Dresden. It is true some people remained ; but for him, no magnet. The superficial must indeed have held something very seductive to attract him, and to penetrate life deeply one must have a higher incentive than mere idle curiosity. Mengen was proud and cold in these days, and feared nothing but the sacrifice of his inward balance and the loss of his self-control. If Dante cared to enter into hell and heaven, he went because Beatrice commanded and guided him. Every one has not a Beatrice or even a Virgil ; Mengen had neither. He liked the society of women well enough as an amusement, and be-

cause a clever and handsome fellow finds in it food for his vanity. But he was generally better understood by men than by women. He laughed a great deal, so that women thought him full of fun; but men knew by experience that one often laughs because it is not advisable for one to weep. Mario laughed at his own colossal desires and their very meager results. He laughed at the masquerade in which head and heart move—one cheating the other. He laughed at the victory, when good sense and feeling fought out their little battle and said to each other: "To-morrow *you* will be vanquisher." He laughed at himself when he steeled and warned himself against the power of feeling. He laughed because he was very earnest. He was a strong man. Obstacles were to him a spur to renewed effort. "Be true to yourself and your purpose," his father had said to him once. "Do not say you will die for it—nothing is easier; but that you will live for it." He had great respect for his father's opinion. It had saved him more than once from some foolish step.

Mario and Feldern were thrown more or less together now, although no deeper interest bound them than the remembrance of their pleasant student days. Feldern was much occupied with his own small concerns, hopes and aims. He was not

one to do his work brilliantly, but he had fidelity. To him Mario's wider horizon and ambitions were almost incomprehensible. Feldern did not aspire or philosophize.

"I shall never be a success," he would say, when Mario asked him why he did not try to better himself.

"Why not as well as another? How can you be so easily contented? When they asked Pope John why he went to Rome—'To become Pope,' he replied—and became Pope. One must lay a hand on a thing, or at least feel the confidence."

"It lies in my character to be content with small happiness," Feldern would reply. "Very few and very calm things satisfy me. Great ones would make me giddy. And then the malice, the inimical glances and words which follow the steps of success! The basilisk eyes that salute you! And, oh, the moods of one's patrons to be borne!—like those of the Sultan with his favorites. Ah, the goddess of happiness herself is not exempt from terrors, I am sure!"

"My dear Feldern, you talk like a timid woman. Is not the whole, great, rich, splendid world for us all? Do you think it is like a fine table-service of glass and silver, which we admire but mustn't touch? There is dust in the arena of the Olympian

games—the stamp of horses and driving of chariots ; but then there is the hope of the triumph.”

“And what good comes from this hardly won triumph.”

“The green crown, *mon ami*.”

“Well, really, Mengen, it seems to me you are as easily satisfied as the rest of us. I thought you aspired to a golden diadem, or to at least a wreath of roses !”

Mario smiled, but his eyes flamed with a sudden fire.

“I don’t want wages ; I only want satisfaction ; and the green wreath, you know, is its symbol.”

“And is that really enough ? Do you long for no other joys, no other pleasures than those of fame ?”

“Oh,” said Mario, laughing. “As far as longing goes I long for a crushing happiness, or else for nothing. No halves, no mediocrities for me, but in one word—all. The gods only know how it would be with such enjoyment, as they alone can bestow it. Until now my life has been mere struggling, and its few successes short-lived dreams from which I have awakened anxious for more of life.”

“You seem so locked up within yourself,” said Feldern, “possibly your aspirations make you happy enough.”

“No one is happy who hasn’t found room to de-

velop his capacity, to stretch himself out in every direction. It seldom goes so well with a man, that his budding fancies come to flower and fruition; there are so many frosts! I suppose only completed men are happy. That I am not, and perhaps never shall be. It seems to me that a cramped youth must petrify old age and even manhood into stone. I don't like it. I want to live while I live, and enjoy with every sense I possess."

"Do you ever think seriously of marrying?"

"Sometimes; in the future," said Mario, smiling. "The fixed star rather pleases my fancy; but my restlessness doesn't agree very well with the fixed-star nature. I suppose this fixity must belong in some way to marriage."

"Marriage only gives it to those to whom it is possible."

"I shall leave all those developments to my future wife. But when shall I become acquainted with *your fiancée*?"

"Will you go out to-morrow?"

"With pleasure."

The next day they rode up toward Meissen, along the Elbe. The estate of Mademoiselle Cunigunde's parents lay half-way between. Mario tried to induce his friend to describe his beloved.

"I could not be impartial," Feldern replied. "You will think her sisters prettier."

"*Diable!* She has sisters then? Why didn't you tell me sooner. I am very chary of entering a house, where there are a lot of young girls."

"Cunigunde's sisters are charming."

"And she herself?"

"Charming is no word for her."

"She will be a sensible, excellent person," thought Mario, and dropped the subject.

At last they reached the place. They rode through an archway, over which two splendid lindens leaned, into a graveled court and stopped their horses before an attractive country house. On the steps which led up into the hall some ladies were sitting. Feldern was pleasantly received, and presented Count Mengen to Madame von Stein and her two younger daughters. Then he asked for Cunigunde. She had gone into the vineyard. Just as Feldern, however, went to find her, she came up with her father. Mario stood petrified by her appearance.

"Is Feldern mad," thought he, "or does he want to make a fool of me! This girl not beautiful! Not as beautiful as those insignificant little sisters of hers! He is certainly blind or crazy?"

Feldern approached his *fiancée* with much warmth; but, whether on account of a stranger's presence or

of a natural reserve, she met him coldly. She made such a graceful, evasive movement that it was impossible for him to kiss her hand, as she stood for a moment near him.

"She looks down upon him. Oh, the pity of it! She is taller than he," thought Mario, "only half an inch, perhaps, but taller; that will never do."

Madame von Stein talked cleverly, which is agreeable. Monsieur von Stein only answered questions, which is also agreeable, when people are tiresome.

Cunigunde did not utter a syllable. Her sisters, however, chattered as much as was needful. The conversation never flagged.

Mengen, although generally at home in all circles, did not feel quite at ease. One false chord destroys a whole concert to a sensitive ear. Cunigunde was this inharmonious chord. Her *hauteur*, her inattention, were contagious to him. The others were undoubtedly accustomed to it. But how could it be so with her lover?

"If that girl were my *fiancée*," thought Mario, "and as indifferent with me, I would not marry her for all the treasures of the world."

If he had been as much enamored as Feldern, he would have married her, notwithstanding.

The girl wore a large straw hat, which not only

shaded her face but even her neck and shoulders.

Feldern begged her to take it off.

"The sun," she said; but as she sat in the shadow of the porch, she corrected herself—"gnats."

"How disagreeable of you," said Frau von Stein, half aloud.

Thus rebuked, the girl silently removed the hat. She had wonderful hair crowning her head in heavy coils.

Feldern took a grape-vine and wound it in her braids. She looked like Ariadne, but with no pain at the infidelity of Theseus, and without triumph at the love of Bacchus. She evidently found little pleasure in the thought that her lover admired her. She only suffered it. And only to suffer a thing means to suffer.

As he touched her hair the hot color flushed for one moment her pale face, and she looked at him with a glance that was inscrutable to Mengen. Later, when she and her decoration were unobserved, she made a sudden movement of the head, which displaced it and threw the loosely bound leaves to the ground.

Feldern could certainly flatter himself with no attention and no smiles from her; but Mengen, even

less. She not only did not speak, but she did not look at any one. Some people need not speak, they have but to glance and one hears a deep intentioned music, such magic have the eyes.

People who speak without looking up must have a very enticing voice or a great richness of eloquence, if their speech is to impress. Unseen speakers only half persuade and never enchant. The expression is so often true when the words lie. The word is a clever pupil of the mind, but the expression or play of the features is a child of the soul, and the soul shines through, as the flesh-tint through a muslin dress. Perhaps Cunigunde intended to conceal her soul.

The cool outside observer sometimes sees through this game more clearly than he upon whom it is intended to impose, and Mario noticed that although she looked at no one, so that you might have believed that she was absorbed entirely in herself, yet she did once or twice raise her eyes, and in them there lurked a hot thirst. A boatman, who would reach the shore, but who cannot for the surging surf, might have this expression. It was an expression of terror.

They had music. The little sisters sang duets with young, fresh voices, and teasingly begged Cunigunde to join them.

"I cannot," said the girl; "I would like to, but can never sing with other people."

"Well, then, sing alone," begged Feldern; and she sang with a beautiful ice-cold voice and lifeless execution, as often as he wished, and such songs as he selected.

When he took his leave, she parted from him as she had greeted him. No glance or word of closer significance passed between them. Scarcely were the friends on horseback when Mario broke out.

"You are quite right. 'Charming' is not the expression for Fräulein von Stein. She is really like a picture, without figure of speech—I mean beautiful as a picture."

"I thought her sisters would please you better."

"My dear fellow, I repudiate this affront to my taste. Two chattering geese and a white swan! When are you to be married to this goddess?"

"In November, I think."

"That is the month in which I always abhor the North. You do very well to crown it with roses. But she is immensely quiet—your bride."

"That is her way."

"How lovely women are!" Mengen broke out once more, after a pause.

"You are quite in ecstasies!" said Feldern, a little coldly.

“How can that surprise you—you, who have been for four years under such witchery, and have borne all the torment of the weary waiting?”

“I don’t torment myself when I am sure of a thing which is only delayed.”

“But doesn’t waiting bring impatience, and don’t you call impatience torment? Do not let Mademoiselle Cunigunde hear that. She would not be pleased with your cold asceticism.”

“I suppose I know best how to get on with my own betrothed!” answered Feldern, ill-humoredly.

“One certainly should,” hovered on Mario’s lips, but he checked the wounding remark. Their conversation continued in monosyllables.

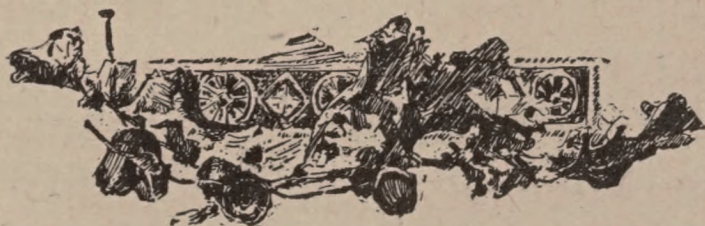
Feldern never invited Mario again to accompany him to see his future bride, and Mario never expressed a wish to do so. He did not interest himself sufficiently in Cunigunde to run the risk of arousing Feldern’s jealousy, and Feldern had certainly shown some annoyance.

“I don’t believe he has ever fathomed that girl’s heart,” Mario thought.

Narrow and self-satisfied people can sometimes rest, however, without such fathoming. Nothing to them exists which they cannot see and understand. Others, less self-satisfied, are made uneasy by the sense that their eyes do not penetrate far enough

—that a great deal is eluding them. In this failure they find a certain humiliation. This alone makes love God-like—that like God, it has divined all. Sense doubts; investigation analyzes; reason tests; love *knows*. But the fretful, uncertain, vague sentiment people call love can certainly know little. How many guess at its secrets only through good luck, through chance, make mistakes, or if they hit the mark, never the central point of the target—never strike the moment in which the bud of the aloe blooms, that flower which only blooms every hundred years. “It is a legend! It is a fable!” say the wise. “Naturalists know nothing of such an aloe!” But the poets know of it, my good friends, and who then is right? Poets are a mystic folk, who have created many other things besides an aloe, which blooms once every hundred years. They drank at the fountain with the Chaldaic shepherds, and the priests of Memphis and of Dodona were their pupils. Children of Homer who created gods! What would men have known of the whole of Olympus, had not old Homer given it to them? Children of Moses who gained a world! The wisest hypotheses of later centuries are worth little, unless in accord with their immortal voices. Whatever the historians and the philosophers discover cannot rob Homer and Moses of their glory. Depend upon the

poets, my good people, even if they bid you believe in the aloe which blooms only once in every hundred years. In the scorching hot desert of life, where the brooks have run dry and the trees are parched, where no bird sings, where no breeze blows, under the burning equator of the heart—there, in spite of all the naturalists may say, blooms this flower! Surely—yes—but only every hundred years. Who can know when he stands before it if the hundred years have not just flown! If any one throws my little book aside impatiently, I cannot blame him. He was prepared to read a story, and I give him foolish legends. He expects that I shall amuse him, not myself. It is difficult to bring the heads of author and reader under the same hat.





CHAPTER XI.

Time passes with equal rapidity in continual change or quiet routine. "Another day gone," says he who has passed the twelve hours at his work, or he who has rushed through the sights of some new place. The quiet man thanks God for his peace and prays for a little amusing distraction. The restless one thanks Him for his amusing annoyances and prays for a little quiet; sometimes neither thinks of prayer or praise; but one stretches out weary feet and the other tired arms.

How wonderful is the similarity of all men's destinies!

"Another summer gone!" sighed Faustine, as she began to think of turning her steps homeward during these short, misty days of the autumn. "I shall have to hurry if I am to see the whole world. Perhaps there won't be time enough, and perhaps there won't be money enough. I wish I might put

on a man's clothes—take up my pack and wander about. How all the *salons* would be closed against this little vagabond, and what a lost creature Countess Obernau would be, so shut out. I can't quite make up my mind to ostracism, and so I lose the best fun in the world."

"You seem so restless—so dissatisfied, Ini; your love so insecure. If I did not know you well, you would make me wretched," said Audlau.

"How absurd you are!" she would answer. "My heart is steadfast enough. You may rely upon it as on a rock. Isn't the magnet the most reliable thing in nature? And isn't it always vacillating here and there? Yet you know it always points unchangingly toward the north. I confess I should rather point to the tropics. Let us go into the dome. It is raining a little."

They were wandering in beautiful Mainz.

"What an untiring church-seer you are."

"Oh, I adore old churches, and I adore old houses—standing so quietly apart out of the way of their neighbors—oh, old houses, how I do love you! In these great, high, lofty apartments, it is still possible to have lofty thoughts. If I were a man, it is only in such a house I would look for a wife. Girls brought up in modern houses are always before strange eyes. All the world pries in at them and

asks carelessly: 'What are you about?' The sun shines into a hundred windows, as into green-houses where flowers are forced. Ah, for a maiden, the shade is well—still, cool, green shade where she can remain fresh. There are no more miracle maidens, with cheeks ablom like the apple-blossoms—they have to learn so much—have so many arts—it tires. I assure you it is all the fault of new houses. If I were a man I would go into the street alone, and I should look to the right and the left. There, all of a sudden, in some dark, old house, at an open window, over a sculptured doorway, I should see a lovely girl working; not quickly, you know, like a servant, but with lazy fingers. Her pouting lips should be singing a song; her hair light and loose, as God wills, and she should have very serious eyes. Such a girl should be my love, and this is the way my wooing should be: Every day I would pass her house at morning and evening. Then one morning I should constrain myself not to go, that her eyes at evening might ask me: 'Where were you this morning early?' Oh, Max, come; we will look for the house and the girl! To be sure, I cannot marry her."

"But I can," said Audlau.

"Just as little," and Faustine threw back her head proudly.

“And what amends will you make the poor girl that she is not to marry at all?”

“I will paint her.”

“Bravo! That will make a pretty picture,” said Audlau, and they walked on through wind and fog. He took great pleasure in her talent. It seemed salutary to her. It was a channel through which the overflow of her feeling spent itself.

He always listened, with pleasure, to the expression of her vagrant fancy. When her opinions did not agree with his they, at least, never jarred upon him, and so it came about that Faustine was tolerably spoiled. All other companionship seemed tiresome and sterile to her. He had accustomed her to speaking inconsequently, thoughtlessly revealing herself to him in perfect freedom. This makes it difficult for a person to conform himself to constraints and conditions, where each word may be weighed and misunderstood. She was only really happy when with Audlau. “‘*Mon aller n'est pas naturel, s'il n'est à pleines voiles;*’ I agree with Montaigne,” she would say. Audlau's love was to her like the spring air, in which she could spread her wings like a lark, rising upon it, soaring and singing.

In Frankfort Audlau found a letter announcing his mother's death. His two brothers wished to

see him on matters of business. There was trouble between them.

"They need me," he said. "I suppose they want a witness to prove that they haven't tried, pistol in hand, to wrest from each other one more Napoleon than was their due."

"You are going to Alsace?" asked Faustine. "You will leave me, Max—I in Dresden, and you on the other side of the Rhine? Ah, that is too far apart." She had long, sleepy, soft eyes, and with these eyes she looked at him now with tender sorrow.

"I may be useful to my brothers," said he, "and must arrange that all may be done in good will. My mother may have made a Benjamin of my youngest brother, who was always her favorite, and this will not please Aloise. I suppose each must look out for the interest of his own family."

"Heavens," interrupted Faustine, "how revolting! No sooner are the eyes that are the most revered under God's sun closed than we throw ourselves like vultures, quarreling over a legacy. And then people say, 'I should never make this dispute for myself. Oh, no! but my children!' Most people, then, make their children a cause of scandal?"

"Dear Ini, I will try to prevent this with my brothers."

“Yes, it is just this that troubles me. Why can’t they go together quietly to your mother’s grave and clasp their hands over it in love and peace? You are a great deal too good to be mixed up in their quarrels. Let the police do it.”

Notwithstanding all her earnestness, Audlau remained steadfast to his resolution. Faustine wept. Audlau promised to escort her back as far as Dresden.

“I shall be absent only a little while,” he said.

“How cold you are,” she cried, and pushed away his hands.

“Do you think so?” he said quietly.

“I really do not see how I love you.”

“I never could see why,” he said. “I often have told you so.”

“But since I do love you,” said the young woman, with sweet and flattering voice, “this separation seems death to me and—to you.”

“Why, Faustine,” he said, “you know that my life is in yours; that you are not only my life and happiness but also my faith and my hope, and that your crystal soul has made mine purer. In you lies a world which makes me crave eternity—an eternity in which I want but you. You have seemed to me God’s most beautiful thought. You know all this, and yet question as if you knew nothing. Don’t

make my heart heavy. I miss you far more than you do me. You can sit down at your easel and create and forget all your sorrow and even all your joy. You lose yourself so easily in a world of fantasies, and your trouble drops from you. Things, after all, are to people what they themselves make them, and you are so rich that the world is a Golconda to you. A passing sorrow is only a well from which you draw new inspirations."

"Yes; but I don't like to draw them from such a well as this. I can do it when I must, but I would rather fold my hands, for it wearies."

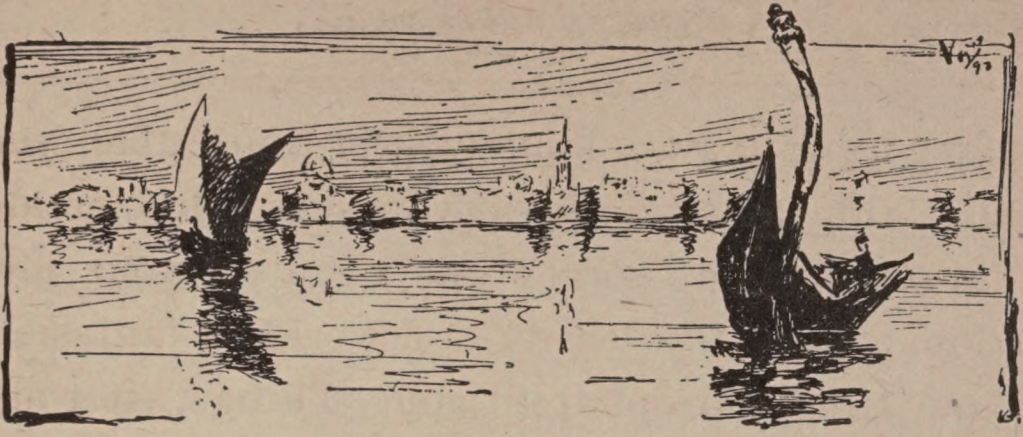
"Afterward, sweet one, you will rest with me."

"Ah! In the meanwhile, I must stand alone."

"Sunbeam, rose-scent, my Ini, you are to me. Shall you evaporate into your natural element from which you sprang, like Venus from the foam?"

He then suddenly put her away from him a little, just touching her hair, as if it had been the vail of a saint, and as if he already feared his prophecy that she would vanish.





CHAPTER XII.

True to his intention, Audlau escorted Faustine, who was unattended, except by her maid, as far as Dresden.

When she was happy, she had a faculty of living in the moment, and she was so enchanting during the journey, that Audlau almost forgot the sacrifice he was making. Some people are more attractive to the many; general approbation gives them encouragement. Others are more charming in the *tête-à-tête*. They are disturbed by many eyes, many questions, many comments. This depends, no doubt, upon the physical temperament, as well as upon special gifts. People who are witty, quick at repartee, and who have a full-toned voice, feel them-

selves at ease in a large circle. Where talk is above light badinage, where seriousness and feeling are, where the tone of voice is low, a smaller audience is more welcome.

Faustine, like nearly all persons who live alone, had a low voice. Where there is a regiment of sisters, with whom one is on equal terms, or of children, who must be commanded, the voice is apt to become loud or resounding. It must dominate to be heard; and people carry this habit from their homes into society. Those who live more alone, without children, without cares, and only on intimate terms with two or three people, cannot address an overflowing drawing-room; they crave silence. Faustine had a low voice, which grew lower the more earnestly and penetratingly she spoke. Sometimes it seemed but an echo of summer winds. And although she possessed, at times, to a rare degree, the gift of eloquent expression, she rarely addressed any one but her neighbor. We can at least be sure that that neighbor was captivated.

If everything in Faustine seemed united to make her lovely in Audlau's eyes, we must know that he loved her. It is a difficult thing for a woman to be always more attractive than any other—after long years perhaps—to the man she loves. Habit is so enervating—blows over them such a damp wind.

But the thing is easy enough if she is loved, and this rare good fortune was Faustine's.

Twenty-four hours after their arrival in Dresden, Audlau left for his home. Having exhausted every word of love and longing tenderness, he said to her in parting :

"Now for the end, Ini, don't forget me."

"What a worn-out jest !"

"No jest; you don't yet know what you may forget."

"Oh, all, *mein Herz*, all; but not you !"

She clung to him with violent grief. When the door had closed upon him, she sank upon her knees, and cried :

"He is gone ! Oh, my God, only Thou stay near me."

She felt herself unspeakably isolated. Her friends and acquaintances immediately sought her out and invited her, and tried in every way to distract and amuse her.

"Audlau is gone; I am devoured with *ennui*," she said, with unflattering frankness to Frau von Eilau, with whom she was on terms of close intimacy.

"You would not be more bored with me, than in your solitude," replied the latter, sweetly. "You will grow hipped between your four walls; you

must shake yourself up a little. It is good for us to forget ourselves."

"Do you think so? I will come to you, then, to-night—if I can conquer myself. There won't be many people?"

"How can I tell? I don't invite any one. Twenty may come, as well as two. But tell me, since when are you so shy of people?" added Frau von Eilau, smilingly.

"Since Audlau left." She had no other thought.

Frau von Eilau had a large, round-table in the middle of her *salon*, about which the ladies sat, idling over their fancy-work and chatting. The men pushed their chairs in among them with fewer words. A little withdrawn was Frau von Eilau's tea-table, so placed that she could make the tea and join in the conversation. On her left a game of chess was in progress; behind her four players were stolidly engaged in a game of cards. Her *salon* was rapidly filling. It was a favorite resort of a certain coterie.

"It is past nine o'clock; Madame Obernau will hardly come now," she said to Feldern. "Go and see her early to-morrow and make my reproaches for me."

"Perhaps she is ill," said Feldern.

"Not a bit; only capricious."

“I shall certainly call upon her to-morrow, and should have done so had she not been absent.”

“And how is Cunigunde?”

“Better ; but she recovers very slowly.”

“Does your wedding-day remain unchanged?”

“I dare hardly hope it or even wish it. Her nerves seem terribly weak.”

“That beautiful strong girl ! What a pity ! How can such a slight cold make such ravages?”

“The physicians know of no cause except a cold she caught in the vintage.”

“La Schroeder Devrient is losing her voice,” said they at the round table. “She had an icy reception in ‘Norma.’ ”

“Ah, how angry she must have been ! She only exists on her triumphs and expects a triumph every moment.”

“Naturally. How can these artists know how they stand with the public if it makes no sign ? Malibran, who might have been supposed to gauge her own powers, trembled with fear until the first burst of applause. Then she felt safe.”

“Heavens ! What a miserable existence ! Such a world-renowned genius dependent upon the moods of the public ! And then all other artists make their demands upon future generations ; but the poor actor

has to do only with his contemporaries. Who hasn't seen and heard him cannot know him."

The door opened. Faustine came in. Madame von Eilau exclaiming: "The later the hour the more beautiful the people," went forward and kissed her.

Faustine rested both her hands on her friend's shoulders.

"My dear, you are such a clever woman! Do speak your own and not other people's words."

"*Bonsoir !*" "How are you?" "Delighted to see you again!" was interchanged with the rest of the party.

As Faustine entered, the man who was playing chess and was engrossed with his pretty companion raised his eyes and recognized her. It was Count Mengen.

"She does look like a beautiful white statue," he thought to himself, holding to his first impressions.

Faustine was dressed in white. She looked very graceful, and yet there was something of coldness about her. A great many women dance well, move well; few stand well—the fewest. Wherein this lies I do not know; perhaps from want of the habit; perhaps from tight shoes; perhaps from a lack of assurance. To stand quietly makes the beauty of standing; but it must not be heavily,

ponderously. It must be a moment's rest between the past and the coming movement. It must be an ephemeral repose, not as if one was rooted to the spot. A woman who stands well is like a queen, surrounded by her court.

Late, and with difficulty, she had decided to come, but once *in* society, she was at home. When she could not so far win the battle with herself as to appear gay and at ease, she remained away.

"How glad I am, countess, worthy of all worship, that you are once more among us," said Feldern.

"God be with you, Herr von Feldern," replied Faustine. "You might have said worshipful countess, as even young Tobias said—'I, too, was once adored.'"

Mengen listened to her voice. "She seems merry," he thought to himself; "beautiful women are generally so *bête*." In the meanwhile he was somewhat neglecting his partner at chess, Lady Geraldine, who believed that she had been the *ne plus ultra* of amiability, in that she had condescended to show herself that evening.

Faustine sat down near Frau von Eilau, and the people who were gathered about the table, in the center of the room, hid her from Mengen's eyes. He could only see her now and then when some one moved. He would have given his life to have

seen that pretty little head uninterruptedly. It was an interesting study through its strange contradictions. He moved his chair first this way and then that, but did not help himself, and Lady Geraldine, looking at him questioningly, took one of his pawns. He had to be patient. That face so near him and yet hidden, rising above the soft lace at her throat, had some peculiar fascination. Each time he looked it seemed to make a new impression.

Faustine's eyes were serious. They did not look about investigatively; they were unconcerned. They were pure as if there were nothing hateful in the world for them to rest upon.

"The eyes of an angel," thought Mengen.

But upon her mouth there played a little spirit of mockery, and then again a vague smile full of some subtle promise.

"But the mouth indeed is the mouth of a woman!"

Lady Geraldine had won the game. Mario stood up.

"You allowed me to win," she said pettishly. "I don't like that. Let us have another game. How *distract* you are."

She liked Mengen and was provoked with him. With cheerful fury he obeyed, and played so well, that he might have checkmated her in five minutes, had she not been his equal in skill.

"So that rich, clever, young fellow, the best *parti* in Europe, has married that adventuress who is at least ten years older," some one was saying from the other side of the room.

"So much the sooner will he be sick of her."

"There isn't any tenderness on her side. All she wants is position and money. She can keep something of that even if they separate."

"Bravo! Consider the possibility of separation in the marriage contract. That pleases me—that is prudence," said some one.

"How degrading," said Faustine, quietly.

"Parents must have this security in these days. Perhaps in two or three years the play is over, and the girl's whole prospect in life is destroyed."

"Oh, I know very well," she replied, "but how dreadful to be mortgaged like a bit of property. Can't a girl, for once, have the confidence that neither heaven nor hell can ever separate her from her husband, even if this confidence is only to last an hour; even children now have no illusions."

"Well, but if they have them only to lose them later?"

"How can one speculate so on one's own ruin? Ah, well, I have given up the hope of reforming others. My own little follies give me too much trouble. I haven't time to heed other people's."

“It is really true that the Prince of X—— at a masked ball presented Herr B—— with a diploma of nobility. Isn’t that too good,” said one of the gentlemen.

“I call it scandalous ! Why, he would have preferred money.”

“But then nobility is more easily conferred than money. There is no more real knighthood in these days.”

“Well,” said Faustine, “there is still some satisfaction, I suppose, left to us in a good name.”

“I only want an honorable one, *gnädigste Gräfin*.”

“We know that of you, Kirchberg,” replied she, smilingly ; “but oh, how entertaining is the usual expression of indifference about titles. ‘A nobleman, indeed !’ say the masses. ‘We can elbow him out with our wealth or our merits,’ but when they find a title within their own grasp, how quickly they wipe the plebeian perspiration from their foreheads and heave the sigh of delight at having reached their goal !”

“We make ourselves merry over everything,” said Kirchberg ; “but the thing has its melancholy side. This aristocracy of wealth is no laughing matter. Great names and estates sacrificed for money ! Where will the advantage lie ? These

people will only use their fists where we have our swords."

"Do you think this craze for power in nations and individuals is what is called original sin?" asked Faustine, laughing.

"Oh," said a young woman, simperingly; "I have always wanted an explanation of original sin, and now that I have it, tell me, countess, what you understand by the sin against the Holy Ghost."

"Stupidity," said Faustine.

"Ah!" said the lady.

"Yes, stupidity which is afraid to learn."

"But when the intelligence is wanting?"

"The stupidest people seem shrewd and sharp enough when it is to their advantage, and impenetrably imbecile only when there is nothing to be gained. When men want to understand anything they understand it quickly enough." With these words Faustine draped herself in her soft wraps and glided from the *salon*.

As Mario ended with a blissful "check-mate!" and looked up, she had vanished. He made an inward vow not to see a chess-board for three months, so vexed was he, and Lady Geraldine's assurances that she had been well amused were no consolation. He had been unable to catch a single word of Faustine's; but it had seemed to him that so lovely a

mouth must give them a brevet of interest. He left Madame von Eilau's, in the highest sense, out of tune.

Faustine wrote to Audlau letters full of love.

“Oh, come back, dear love. You will say that we were separated often before, but the summer is different. Nature, you know, is my element—freedom and beauty—but now I am immured like a wicked nun. I watch the poor dead leaves blown about by every wind, and I am scourged with them, and I do not know where I go. How am I not to feel this general desolation. I am afraid—yet no one can harm me; I am cold—yet it is very warm in my room. Fearful and trembling, I would like to hide myself on thy heart, my friend. I do not know what strange anxiety possesses me. To be sure it is always there when you are absent; but still I seem to feel some cloud hanging over my head, and dare not take a step forward lest I fall into some hidden trap.”

“I wrote so far last night, I did not like to end my letter in such a gloomy mood. To-day with the sunlight my sad presentiments have flown. Do not give me a lecture. Do not pay any attention to them. I know I am a weather-cock, to be so governed by the winds, but if you will consider the small capital of good sense I possess, you will be indulgent. I have grown tired of these haunting thoughts. I must go to work; that will banish the evil spirits.

“A dim November sun shines to-day; but the love in my heart is not like November. *A tout prendre*, Max, I am happy. Will that make you so? All I know of happiness I know through you? God be with you as I am.”

She carried out her intentions and threw herself ardently into her painting. She painted the whole day. She dined very late to lose no time; then

drove out at evening to breathe the air, not being able to walk in the darkness. When she returned, she finished her day with reading. To society she made herself invisible. Frau von Eilau, Feldern and Count Kirchberg sometimes came to see her in the evening.





CHAPTER XIII.

“How long do you intend leading this hermit life, countess?” Kirchberg asked her one day.

“I don’t know. It’s so nice—I would like it forever. One must be occupied, and then my good friends do find me out sometimes.”

“But we miss you terribly!”

“I hope so,” said Faustine, laughing.

“You don’t seem to believe it.”

“Yes, I believe it very well. I always believe pleasant things about myself. I talk more of sentiments, perhaps, than of things, and that is new to people and interests them a little. But what is the good of being a machine for amusing others?”

“Don’t you think arousing conversation in others an advantage? Why, thousands would envy you. Richly gifted people have a responsibility. They must dispense their gifts generously—not hide them.”

“Ah, dear count, that reproach is not mine,” said Faustine. “I am no miser. If there exists a creature always and everlastingly ready to give, I am she. When I have nothing else to give, I give the truth. Who else does?”

Kirchberg smiled.

“A little too true, sometimes,” he said. “You can treat people scornfully and impatiently enough.”

“Why not, when I discover we could never accord?”

“No; but you do it from the very first.”

“Please give me an instance.”

“When Feldern begged, day before yesterday, to present his friend, Count Mengen, you ill-humoredly declined.”

“Ill-humoredly! Oh, that is a Feldernism. He is so sensitive, poor fellow! Because I do not on the spot fall into his friends’ arms, I am ill-humored, forsooth! I will meet his Count Mengen with pleasure when I am in a more genial mood.”

“Isn’t it inconceivable to you that such an oversensitive fellow as Feldern can support his relations to Fräulein von Stein?”

“Why so? What has happened?”

“Oh, nothing. Only she shows very little longing to be his wife.”

“That is as it should be.”

“*A la bonne heure*, but she shows the very contrary—aversion.”

“Do you really think,” said Faustine, earnestly, “she will not marry him?”

Kirchberg shrugged his shoulders.

“Kirchberg,” she continued, quickly, “go at once to Feldern and ask him to come to me.”

“Will you forbid him to marry her? Can you? What have you to say to him on this matter?”

“I shall implore him not to marry her.”

“That is of doubtful wisdom, dear countess; perhaps he will not, since I hear the wedding is indefinitely postponed until Mademoiselle von Stein’s recovery, and I believe that will never be. Why mix yourself in their relations? If their hearts don’t understand each other, why trouble yourself? You will have small thanks.”

“Oh, you men of the world!” cried Faustine. “All you want of me is to be a vagabond in society; to talk and dance and play the coquette. When I say it bores me you reply: ‘It is your duty to associate with your fellow-beings.’ And when I wish to do so in my own way then you cry: ‘Halt! Don’t be too impulsive. Don’t give your hand too heartily. Don’t give honest words of kindness or of warning. Only flit and dazzle—that is quite enough. Oh, Kirchberg, I can’t bear you!’”

"I don't blame you, sweet countess, and it is a refreshment to meet one like yourself who shows herself."

"You are unbearable with your flatteries," said Faustine, laughing. "Unhappily, they are useless. To be told something more about poor Feldern would please me much better."

"Which unfortunately I can't do," replied Kirchberg, and left.

Already two months had passed and Audlau had not returned. He had found the affairs of his dead mother in hopeless confusion. His brothers had great confidence in him and wished him for arbiter.

"My mother's estate must be sold," he wrote Faustine, "and I may be detained here till spring. So long must I have patience, my dear Ini. Then I am free and doubly happy because I shall have purchased my liberty through a sacrifice. I am harassed to death, but when I am tired of men and of life I turn to the thought of you. You lift me when I doubt. Women have more influence over men, than men over women to change a mood. They are so subtle that they penetrate into the very veins of a man's being, like balsam or like poison. I sometimes think that although it flatters their vanity, women shrink a little from the responsibility of their immense influence, but it is not to be gainsaid—"

Audlau's words were true enough, for they did not alter the mood in which they found Faustine. When she received this letter she had come to an end of her painting, her reading, her inspirations,

occupations and patience. She took it as impossible to continue this sort of life for at least three months longer, for not only her body but her mind was worn out with the changeless strain and absorption of her thoughts.

"If only heaven would send me something beautiful!" she thought. "Oh, I need it!"

It was dark in her room. She lay on her sofa so lost in wakeful dreams that she was almost like one asleep. She heard the outer door of the ante-chamber open—heard a whisper and a footstep, but she did not care to ring and ask what it was; she felt weary. Suddenly it crossed her mind that Audlau might have wished to surprise her with a visit and she sprang up. She forced herself, however, just as quickly back into her former position.

"I will enter into his plan," she thought; "I will only recognize him when he stands near me."

She remained immovable, but her heart beat to suffocation and she grew breathless with rapturous expectation. The door opened. Hardly had a man's form stepped across the threshold when, although unable to distinguish, Faustine knew it was not Audlau. She rose, rang the bell and asked at the same time in a strained, hard voice:

"Who is so kind as to make me this unlooked-for visit?"

"I! Please don't take it amiss," was the answer.

"Clemens Waldorf—my good fellow, you should have yourself announced to a lady."

"I asked your maid if you were at home alone and well—"

"Then you were informed; but I— What do you do here in Dresden?" Her lips trembled; she was deathly pale.

A lamp was brought and placed on the table near her. She was suddenly wonderfully illuminated. The rays of light touched her black-satin gown and played about her graceful person; the soft neck, the slender hands; and the colors which were wanting in her dress flamed back suddenly into her lovely face. Clemens, who was lost in contemplation of her, forgot to reply.

"If you please, hand me my work-basket from that table," asked Faustine, after a moment of embarrassed silence. "As you seem no friend to conversation, perhaps you are no enemy to worsted-work."

Clemens mastered himself sufficiently to fetch the basket, but instead of giving it to her, held it in his hands.

"You asked me what I want here! Well, to look at the contents of this little basket. Dare I?"

"Don't waste your eye-sight over such trifles,

when there is such a world full of beauty." She spoke absently, hardly looking at him.

Clemens began, notwithstanding, an inventory of the work-basket.

"Thimble and scissors, prettily made—a scent bottle—a pencil of tortoise-shell inlaid with silver—very neat, but what an ugly porcelain needle-book!"

"Ugly, unhappy one! It is adorable. It is rococo."

"Perhaps an heirloom of your grandmothers and respectable as such."

"We will have nothing 'respectable;' 'rococo' is the modish thing."

"As you like; only don't call it beautiful. This Russian-leather case, with your visiting-cards, pleases me better. Ah, a letter!" (It was Audlau's letter.) "It must be nice to dare to write you."

"Much nicer to talk with me."

"Are you satisfied with me that I did not write to you?"

"I am. Now leave the basket in good order—so. That museum has been explored."

"Dresden pleases me immensely," said Clemens; "ultimately I shall see the picture-gallery—yours."

Feldern's entrance disturbed his happiness, and Faustine's words did so still more.

"My anchorite's mood is over. I shall now go out a great deal and shall be very happy if people

will come and see me often. Count Mengen, my dear fellow, will be most welcome. I am thirsting for society, for distraction and for excitement."

"Why did you ever let yourself reach such a point, countess? An artist's caprice?" said Feldern.

"Although, to be sure, I am only a miserable little *dilettante*, I have one similarity to a real artist—moments and moods. I do everything by fits and starts."

"That is what makes you so interesting."

"Everybody says I am *interesting*. I should like to know what the word means?"

"That you are full of contradictions, I suppose; pathos and merriment and a certain softness with a strong courage; you are moody and yet tender; you have decision, and yet a girl's grace."

"Have I all these?" asks Faustine, wearily.

"No—far more!" said Clemens, shortly.

Feldern looked up at him, and Faustine presented the two young men, recommending Waldorf to Feldern's courtesy.

"He has come to see Dresden," she said.

"Not at all," said Clemens, again very bluntly.

"Pray tell me what you came to see," replied Faustine.

"I came to see you, and now that this intention has been gratified—"

“Are you going back to Oberwaldorf?”

“I shall go to bed.”

“I hope you will be better disposed to-morrow to enjoy the city.”

Feldern gazed after the departing Clemens with much amusement.

“What a rough diamond!” he said.

“Yes, he lacks polish; much is wanting; but, at least, he is not perverted. Be friendly to him,” Faustine sighed.

“As soon as you will be so to my friend Mengen.”

“Oh, he does not need it; he has been here six months and is already well received.”

“If you knew how much he wants to make your acquaintance!”

“What does he know about me?”

“He has seen you twice; but only in the distance.”

“Ah,” cried Faustine, “he has seen me! Then I understand.”

Feldern laughed.

“Why do you smile, it seems so simple? Isn’t the first impression of a person often enough to make us shrink from or wish for the person’s acquaintance. We haven’t any prejudices then for or against him. I believe that the unconscious soul knows its wants and its dangers—it is really shocking that one can’t

“speak frankly. People attribute everything to vanity.”

“If the cap doesn’t fit you, then you needn’t care.”

“No, I can only pity you that you haven’t the pleasure of believing in unconsciousness.”

“Ah, countess, one must be very young, very inexperienced, or very much in love, to believe in it—as far as women are concerned, certainly. There lies an abyss of untruth in them.”

Faustine was surprised at this outburst, as Feldern rarely showed any emotion. She wondered what might be the rankling wound that led to such an unusual bitterness. Before she could find an answer, however, Feldern had changed the subject.

“So then to-morrow I can bring you Mengen, and you will excuse that I do it early as I am overwhelmed with work.”

After Feldern had left, the poignancy of Faustine’s disappointment dulled itself into a faint heart-ache. She had felt, too, a little inexplicable anger against Audlau; it was rather sustaining than otherwise.





CHAPTER XIV.

“At last,” said Mario, when he stood before Faustine on the following morning.

“Just at the right time!” said Faustine.

Their eyes met and sank into each other's like clasped hands. He spoke unusually little. He let Feldern talk, and Kirchberg, whom he found there—and Clemens, who came later and listened through the general murmur for the melody of her tones; and as he listened he felt that restfulness with which we find the long-sought solution of a problem. Clemens gazed at her with an impatient fever—with a rude dissatisfaction if her eyes rested for a moment longer on another than on himself. But Mario's glance enveloped her protectingly, and he felt a sense of repose. To-day, in the bright light and so near, she seemed to him less dazzling than at Frau von Eilau's—less queenly than on the terrace. Her own room touched her with domesticity. She herself and all her surroundings were so quiet

and so easy. No loud footfalls fell on the rich carpet, and the dark curtains, which hung at the windows of the *salon*, shutting out the sight of snow and frost, seemed to give a warm color to the rays of the cold winter sun. The door opened into another room, of which the windows were also heavily curtained and the floor richly carpeted in the same soft shades of color. The whole had a pleasant atmosphere. The rooms had their individuality. A picture hung in the first apartment which one sees seldom. It was a well-executed copy of "Christ with the Tribute Money." Clemens inquired if she had painted it.

"No," she answered; "I cannot copy. I always inadvertently put in something of my own, and what a shame that would be in this heavenly picture."

"Nothing in the whole gallery has so attracted me as this picture," said Mario. "This representation of Christ seems to meet one's idea of His spirituality and grandeur."

"I am so glad," said Faustine. "So few people share my predilections. People usually prefer the Christ of Guido Reni or Carlo Dolce. Of course, it depends upon one's own conception. It seems to me heaven and earth were never portrayed before, in a small space, with such truth and simplicity."

"Can heaven and earth really come so near each other?"

"Oh, always—always!" said Faustine, warmly; "always inseparable and yet as widely apart as Christ and the Pharisee. As widely apart as when they appear to blend at the horizon. Minds touch, but souls are divided."

"And united?"

"Oh, that I call love."

A sudden pallor overspread Feldern's features. He stood up and made his adieux, somewhat shortly. Faustine looked at Kirchberg questioningly. He met with such a diplomatic inscrutable visage that she feared she had asked too much. Mengen saw her embarrassment and quietly came to her rescue.

"That engagement will be broken. They don't suit each other. It was clear from the first moment."

"They say—" said Kirchberg.

"It isn't true," said Faustine.

"What, graceful countess?" he asked, surprised.

"All *on dits* are once and forever untrue," she replied.

"Perhaps—I hope so. Nevertheless, people do say that a *liaison de bas étage* makes the marriage impossible."

"Kirchberg," said Faustine, tremulously, "how dare you speak so of a young girl—how dare your

lips! Women seem to have lost the respect of men, *et elles vous le rendent bien!* But in pity spare the young girls. If they are not pure, what is? If men see in them only the crude, the unfinished, I must see the untouched and the unsullied. Ah, I wish every girl died in her eighteenth year!"

"This wish finds no response in the young ladies' breasts," laughed Kirchberg.

"I don't mean young ladies. They may live to be old ones; I mean young girls."

"I don't follow the subtle difference."

"No difference!" cried Faustine, clasping her hands. "Dear Waldorf, Count Mengen, don't men make a difference between a girl and a young lady!"

Clemens looked at Faustine fixedly and silently. He was certainly far too indifferent to all women to make any distinction; nor was he accustomed to this kind of badinage, this game between earnest and jest, which seemed Faustine's element. He always spoke from his heart or not at all. Mengen, on the contrary, met her on her own ground.

"Why, the girl is fresh from heaven," he said, "and would gladly fly back to her home, but a young lady has been at earth's school and has learned to fold her white wings so that they may not interfere, and she intends to graduate in all the classes."

"Yes, you have it," said Faustine. "These men here should be thankful to you that you spoke them free from their touch of blindness."

"We are not blind," said Clemens. "we only do not see what does not interest us."

"Really," said Faustine, "I thought it was we women who were so one-sided, and that men analysed on a large scale. By parenthesis, be it said, that is one reason why they are so unbearably fatiguing."

"Thanks," said Mario, laughing.

"They are so indifferent, so without freshness, enthusiasm—all that burns in the blood—so wearying with their endless baggage of sophistries, common-places and prudences. It is only we who go to battle without armor, fearless of consequences."

"Oh, countess," cried Mario; "men have more enthusiasm than women. I don't mean a momentary exaltation; but that tenacity that keeps one straight line in steadfast view; the unswerving mind—the one possessing idea that pursues its desire with a perseverance of which all power and warmth are born."

"You mean character," said Faustine.

"Ah, well! What sustains character, if not enthusiasm? One wouldn't have only the mule's perseverance, plodding over the mountain between

his two burdens. No, men seem to me oftener inspired by enthusiasm than women."

"And the prophetesses of Israel and the death-despising Roman women?"

"I agree to all that. But, after all, it was only the personal love for lover, country or God. A woman will die for her lover, but never make him immortal, as Petrarch did Laura, or Dante, Beatrice. What woman has ever had the patience to wrest knowledge from science—to upheave the world? They amuse themselves for a little while in the pursuit of some idea, more through caprice or for the love of intrigue than through real enthusiasm. What woman ever said with Galileo: '*Pur si muove?*' And only fancy Socrates in petticoat! I must, however, confess to their influence over us. When a man is ruined, it is always through a woman."

"Oh, Count Mengen," cried Faustine, "you are terribly partial to your own sex. The same thing may be reversed."

"A woman can elevate a ruined and fallen man. Can this, too, be reversed?"

"A degraded woman rarely rises. A bad man ruins her too utterly for a good man ever to redeem." She paused, and then added, as if to herself: "Is our influence stronger for good than evil?"

Clemens, who had silently listened, looked up.

“Neither,” he said. “If you order me to pull one man up out of the water and throw another one in, I do both with equal gratification.”

“Heaven deliver me from such a blindly devoted friend. No one wants to influence a machine. I rid myself of all further influence over *you*.”

Faustine shrugged her shoulders with a little shiver.

“You have it unwittingly.”

“I won’t have it,” she cried, drawing herself together as one does from contact in a crowd.

Mario felt that it was time for him to leave. He feared to be importunate in his first visit.

“If she were only not speaking—if she were only not moving—if she were only another—how easy to go,” he thought to himself.

Kirchberg had made his farewells. Now Clemens departed. At last Mengen conquered himself and rose.

“Feldern told me some time since that you were too much occupied with your art to find pleasure in society. When I asked him what you painted he answered: ‘Trees.’ Will you not have the sweetness to let me see these trees which have been overshadowing you so long?”

“Did Feldern say ‘trees?’ How funny! And how cruel only to see trees in my pictures! If you

will come some morning I will show them to you."

"To-morrow?"

"Oh, well, to-morrow."

He seemed as elated as Clemens had been annoyed. Faustine thought: "What an agreeable man! Why didn't I know him sooner? I have to thank my own folly. It's a mistake. It has brought me no good. Even the cholera shouldn't prevent us from making interesting acquaintances."





CHAPTER XV.

Feldern rode along the lonely Chaussée, all the well-known way to his *fiancée's*. At the house he first met her father, and asked hurriedly for Cunigunde.

"She is no better," said Herr von Stein, sorrowfully ; "come to her." He led Feldern to her little fresh girl's room. Cunigunde was sitting by a table, reading the Bible. "How do you feel, my child?" asked her father, putting his hand gently under her chin.

"Very well, dear father," she replied, kissing his hand.

"You are not going to die yet, are you, my good, pious little one?" touching the book and then stroking her cheeks and hair.

"Why, no, dear papa," she said, looking at him with a certain melancholy tenderness,

"Feldern is here. Dare he come in?" continued her father.

Suddenly a shudder of fear seemed to shake the girl.

"Yes," she said, and the father left them alone.

"Well, Cunigunde," said Feldern, and sat down opposite to her.

"Good evening, Feldern," was all she said. She seemed unspeakably agitated.

"Have you nothing further to say to me? Can you feel no confidence in me? Only speak—give me a reason."

"I talk myself weary, and I have no reason."

"And so you insist, through a caprice—through a mood, in throwing me over—your true, proved, tried friend, whom you had accepted as your future husband?"

"No mood—O, God!" said the girl, and wrung her hands.

"Speak out the why. As soon as I know what comes between us I will overcome it, or renounce you. It seems to me now like some fixed idea, like some sickness of the mind, and I have no courage to sacrifice my happiness, my future, possibly yours, to a childish whim."

"I know you mean to be kind and reasonable; I thoroughly understand you—better than I do my-

self. But the why I cannot give you ; only I cannot marry you."

"Then there is only this: You love some one else."

"Your monomania—which I have a hundred times denied."

"Another of whom you are ashamed, or who is unworthy of you— Is it a disgrace to love? Why don't you name him?"

"I love no one."

Feldern sprang to his feet with hot impatience and walked up and down the little room. At last he stopped, facing the girl.

"Whom do you intend to marry?" he asked huskily.

"No one," said Cunigunde, looking at him strangely, "and you know it. If I wanted to marry, the simplest thing would be to marry you, whom I respect—who are brave and honest, and have loved me—"

"Cunigunde!" cried Feldern, tenderly putting his arm around her shoulders and bending down to her; but his kiss scarcely touched her cheek before she turned her head, closed her eyes and said in anguish:

"Have mercy!"

Doubly wounded, Feldern allowed his arm to sink.

"You are lying or mad," he said, almost brutally.

"No lie; my words are the truth. I do not forget my esteem for you; only this gave me courage to beg you to release me from my promise."

"Then, if not madness, it is mere perverseness. Some over-strained sentimentality. What do you want? To become a Catholic and take the veil? Has the religious mania hold of you?"

"I don't wish to be a nun—never!" she said; and such a fresh, rosy blush of life over-spread her whole face, that Feldern, in spite of his bewildered discouragement, smiled.

"It would, indeed, be a pity for you to have a vocation; but now what is to become of us?"

"What God wills." She clasped her hands upon the Bible and bowed her head.

"How is His will to reveal itself, when you close your ears and heart to the prayers of your best friends?"

"My best friends? Ah, it's just that, I have no friends."

"Your parents—myself—"

"Yes, dear Feldern; and it is unfortunate that this very circumstance brings you too near to be impartial. My parents! Ah, my poor father, who wants every one to be happy, and who does everything my mother wants; and my mother is a clever

woman and a good woman, too ; she means well by us all, and by me. She says I am poor, and what more do I want than to marry a nice fellow ; I am the beauty of the family and a disadvantage to my sisters too, you know. Oh, no, I have no friends, and I know no one I want for a friend—except perhaps—”

“Whom ?” he asked, with breathless eagerness ;
“Count Mengen, perhaps ?”

“Whom did you say ?” said Cunigunde, *distracte*.

“Count Mengen, who was here with me once in the late summer.”

“Oh, no ; it is no man ; it is a woman—a heavenly woman you introduced me to last winter at the Bal Masque—Countess Obernau. I only saw her that once, but I can never forget her. The expression of her eyes, how she moved and stood—how she spoke and smiled, always reminds me of Goethe’s ‘*Das Mädchen aus der Fremde*,’ and I wish I could be a poor *bergère* to go to her with a gift.”

“Dear Cunigunde, you are really a little overstrained. You have sentiment enough in you ; but it seems to me you think it higher and purer to be exalted about another woman. Countess Obernau is certainly an uncommonly lovely person ; but every one cannot do as she does with life. She could not serve as a model to you.”

“I don’t expect to be like her. I only wish that she loved me. Don’t you wish it for yourself?”

Feldern could not help laughing.

“Not in the least, although we are the best of friends. Would you like to go to see her? I am sure she will be pleased. I believe the monotony of your life here is affecting your nerves. Perhaps this little distraction will do you good. Dear child, I would so gladly see you strong again and happy.”

Cunigunde gave him her hand gratefully, pleased with his proposition. She hardly knew what she hoped, but felt as if moving toward freedom and heaven. Her beautiful face, which was ennobled by its expression of settled sadness, was suddenly lit up with a new hope. They parted with more friendliness than for months past.

“Faustine may have peculiar views,” thought Feldern, “and not be entirely practical on many social questions ; but no one is less sentimental. In her clear breath Cunigunde’s exaltation must fall, and, this once past, I am sure of her. She has never had an inclination for any other, and her temperament is cold. These make the best wives. Women whom a man can depend upon—without vagaries—without fear-inspiring seductions. They don’t fire the heart, but they always please. Faustine has more dangerous charm, but who would dare to

marry her? Not even Audlau. A man feels himself so stupid, so inferior, in the atmosphere of such women."

Perhaps Feldern did not realize that there may lurk in the love of such a woman a reward for all humiliation. Who has solved the secrets and sorceries of its influence or its intoxication! A strong man is not afraid to look up to his beloved. He feels in himself the power with one effort to stand at her side. The weak vain man likes to keep her to his own level; he fears to be eclipsed, and knows he lacks the strength to cast a counter-weight into the balance.





CHAPTER XVI.

Mengen did not fail to present himself at Faustine's on the following morning. The servant ushered him into the *salon*. It was deserted. Mario crossed it, and penetrated into the second apartment, of which yesterday he had but seen the entrance. Near one of the windows was her writing-table. Upon it stood a portrait of Audlau. It was painted with rare beauty and exactitude—a thoughtful, earnest, melancholy head. “Is one not gayer when near her?” thought Mario. In the embrasure of the other window stood a shelved table piled with books, near which was a deep low chair. On the other side was drawn a broad cushioned ottoman, on which lay a black-lace scarf. The heavy dark-red curtains gave a warm, soft light to the whole room. A room is the overflow of individual-

ity. It vaguely divulges secrets, and something of its owner's spirit has been forgotten there. Mario sank peacefully in the corner of the sofa. Faustine seemed present to him.

"Did some one speak?" said her golden voice from a half-open door.

"I await your commands," said Mario, stepping toward the voice and entering a small *atelier* fitted up for painting purposes. There was but one window, shaded from below. Pictures, drawings, etchings, sketches, covered the bare walls. No furniture except several easels, a couple of tables, on which were scattered maps, drawing materials, a skull, plaster casts of arms and legs, and two straw chairs, also encumbered with artists' utensils.

"Sit down," said Faustine. She was at her easel, working.

"Rather a difficult matter," said Mario, looking about him.

"If you don't feel comfortable here, wait for me in the drawing-room. Ten minutes, and I will have finished this sketch."

"I must make the best arrangement possible," and he very gracefully bent one knee before her.

"That will do," she continued, and went on painting. He watched her. Her dress was the most disadvantageous in the world. A bit of white

muslin was tied back over her hair, so as almost entirely to conceal it. She wore a coarse gray apron and *manchettes*. For any other woman it would have been an abjuring of all vanity to have been seen in such a costume. Faustine was absorbed in her picture; she seemed to forget her gray apron—or was she coquettishly conscious that it was not absolutely unbecoming? She sat silent, her lips a little parted, as if she were listening; her eyes half shaded by their white lids, as if to rest themselves. Turtle-doves have this way. At last, Mario came close to her, and looked at her work—

“Why are you painting that death’s head! What do you know of death—you who are all light and warmth?”

“I would like to paint life, too,” she replied; “but nothing occurs to me but a mass of flowers, through which the death’s head is still seen. You are quite right. I have nothing to do with death—so little that I don’t even understand it. To go from one form of existence to another—is that death? Why, it is only development. Ah, one must live as one loves—through eternity. Who hasn’t this conviction knows nothing of love or of life. I am a great enemy of death. But we must not begrudge the poor body its rest in the grave, although it grows ugly like my old death’s-head here.”

“And, pray, why do you grant the body the rest which the mind needs so much more? Twenty-four hours obliterate the remembrance of physical pain. What is bodily fatigue after all? After two nights of dissipation there is sleep as a pleasant antidote. But that weariness of mind that follows over-excitement—what paralysis! How difficult to remedy!”

“Oh, but the mind has its joy, its amusement, its compensations, and the poor body nothing of all that. What a slave it is to the mind! It no sooner has set its table to enjoy than its horrid tyrant sits down and sips all the froth off the champagne—all the sweetness from the dainties (through some disagreeable thought, you know), while its meek servant stands behind the chair in disappointment. And now I have ended my sketch, you shall see the promised ‘trees.’”

She rose, placed a picture on the easel and said:

“Sit here.”

A crag rose from the sea, precipitate and lonely. Beneath it, to the right, with interlacing branches, stood two trees—a fir and a birch. They formed a somber foreground to the scene. The birch was leafless; its white slenderness seemed to shiver and tremble in the storm. The fir spread its branches over it like protecting arms. The sky was cold, icy,

gray ; to the west it faded into a copper tint. Beneath slumbered the sea.

After a little time Faustine placed another picture on the easel. It was the same subject, but in spring-time, in a morning light. The birch, fresh and glowing in sunlight, adorned the dark fir-tree with its waving leaves as with festive garlands.

“Do you like that?”

“Ah!” he said. “You know how to paint. You weave a poem into your pictures. I don’t wonder that Feldern and a thousand others see only a pretty landscape. There is a Sanctum too deep sometimes for the comprehension of the connoisseur.”

At that moment Clemens came in.

“I know that fir!” he cried, looking at the picture while the other two were still standing near. “I remember it; you drew it quickly in one of our walks at Oberwaldorf. How glad I am that you have remembered something of that time—if not of people, at least of a tree.”

“I try to keep everything that is worth remembering,” said Faustine.

“Or hoping?” asked Clemens.

“Better still.” And she now moved as if to invite the gentlemen to leave the *atelier*.

Mario and Clemens already disliked each other cordially with that vague antagonism which forms

a sort of tie between two persons who have a care for a third in love or in hate. We will love the brother—the friend of the beloved one; but let any one dare approach them with our own measure of adoration! Clemens hated Mario and was jealous of him. He felt that Count Mengen could please her better. He possessed the *savoir faire* which she liked. Mario had stared for a moment at the young fellow whose brusque manner and undisguised expression of every emotion had at first somewhat amused him; then had turned away, hardly thinking him worth a second thought. Since, however, he noticed that Clemens seemed to jar on Faustine, he resented the annoyance for her, although the boy's roughness only enhanced by contrast the young woman's exquisite elegance and delicacy.

“How dreadful men are when they come from college,” she once had said; “so inflated with their own importance and utterly ignorant of everything that makes a man tolerable. What have they to be so conceited about, I wonder? That they were drunk once or twice, that they did not lose their head in every examination, and that their promise of a fine beard has been appreciated by some university-town beauty?”

Clemens, who was rather proud of his beard, was justly irritated.

“How I love good manners,” she continued. “One feels so safe and comfortable where they are. Where they are wanting I always try to be doubly courteous. At last, however, one grows constrained—uneasy—angry. One could cry out as if from some blow.”

“What do you call bad manners?” asked Clemens.

“Not knowing when one is a bore,” she answered, half-closing her eyes.





CHAPTER XVII.

Feldern kept his word with Cunigunde. He begged Faustine to receive his *fiancée*.

"I feel sure of your excellent influence on her sentimental little head," he said.

Faustine looked at him narrowly.

"You would like to set its limits, however, and I must know what is expected of me. Why not be more frank? Am I to give Fräulein von Stein hints upon the art of painting?"

"She doesn't paint, and it is a friend she looks for in you—not a teacher."

"Very well; I thank Mademoiselle von Stein already for her trust. But don't forget I am not the person to keep back my own opinions, and if I am asked advice, nothing can prevent me from giving it out of my own convictions, whether it please or no. Bring the girl," she said.

Cunigunde was charmed with the permission;

Frau von Stein satisfied to find that anything could awaken her daughter from her unnatural apathy; Herr von Stein very willing to take her into Dresden and to procure a little amusement for her.

Faustine, on her part, thanked heaven that people seemed sent to occupy her.

Mario came almost daily. Had she wished it, he would have spent his every hour with her. Their discussions were arousing and interesting, even if they did not always agree. They did not deal in common-places, these two. From this comradeship she sometimes awoke to a strange sense that he was much in her thoughts. Sometimes there welled in the man's words a sort of passion that surrounded him with a dangerous magnetism. She thought of him—yes—and more than she wished. Of course, it was only to admire his gifts.

“It is a distraction like any other,” she said to herself.

Clemens, too, was constantly there, and he wearied and annoyed her more than of old. In the last days of Oberwaldorf it had been borne in upon her that he had a strong inclination for her; but she believed that her own conduct must have bereft him of all hope and shown him the absurdity of his sentiments. When he arrived in Dresden she expected to find him entirely cured of his foolish

dreams; and, not believing in a lasting love without reciprocity, she thought it a kindness to open the doors of the world for him a little and shield his inexperience from bad influences. But things did not arrange themselves. Clemens had in no wise forsworn the folly that possessed him. Faustine was still to him the unspoken mystery of happiness and of beauty, to which we all aspire. *She* only made it clear to him; and the creature who lifts us into this heaven of joy do we not love? Is love other than the revelation of endless beauty and immortal joy? So thought Clemens in the long, lonely days which followed Faustine's departure from Oberwaldorf. That she did not love him seemed perfectly natural to him. He asked himself in his humility, "What am I to win it? Is it not my bliss to give her my love? I won't have hers. She must take my heart, even if she tramples it in the dust. Ah, but she will not do that! She must know the worth of a heart, since God does, and she is godlike." So he came out of the sameness of his narrow life—to Dresden.

Here he saw Faustine amid quite different surroundings. She was courted, admired, worshiped. Men and women wanted to know her. Whoever approached her brought homage. It seemed to him that every man loved her and laid himself at her

feet. What was he? Why should one so spoiled look at him? He was lost in the throng. He was jealous like a child without an object, without reason. This watching, waiting eagerness made him discontented with himself and a source of irritation to Faustine, who could not find a reason to absolutely dismiss him. Sometimes when he was alone with her his devotion touched her, and she was kind and friendly as was her wont; but Clemens at once became so enraptured that she was forced to dampen his ardor a little by showing the same warmth to other friends.

The hardest for Clemens to bear was the approach of the hated Mario, who Clemens at once recognized as aspiring to something more than ordinary friendship. He gave way then to expressions of anger and of bitterness, before unknown to his straight, sweet nature, and the lack of policy which betrayed his mood made him half ridiculous.

Faustine had hopes that the fear of ridicule in one not devoid of pride would induce him to assert some self-control. But his passion ignored all wisdom, and at last Faustine was forced to treat him with decided coldness, and he came less often. Once she asked him what he did with his time.

"I have met some artists," he said. "I want to be a painter."

She laughed, glad, however, that he had found some occupation.

Cunigunde came. Faustine received her with that charming warmth which was always hers when interested. They were lovely to look upon—these two. Cunigunde wore her hair closely binding her noble patrician head. It framed a face more pale from anguish than from illness. The girlish lips were firmly closed; they had seldom smiled—never kissed. The long eyes, generally downcast, revealed, when the lids were raised, a certain mystery, as of the night, in their dark depths.

Faustine, beside her, seemed a breath of the dawn—a crystal reflecting a thousand subtle prismatic colors. Only a poet could appreciate her head; Cunigunde's, a sculptor.

Not the night alone, but the day, too, has its secrets. Who can look up into the sky on a summer's noon and penetrate its depth? It is as if a golden veil trembled before one's vision; and this atmosphere surrounded Faustine—separated her from others. She was the graceful, easy woman of the world; but she was something more than this. Two things blended in her which are rarely united—passion and imagination. There hung about her very garments, as it were, the perfume of some tropic flower.

This atmosphere melted at once the icy-chains that had bound the girl's heart, just as it had burned Mario's free wings.

Cunigunde told Faustine her short and sad story, how, four years since, she had willingly engaged herself to Feldern and now found it impossible to marry him, and was considered to be ill or mad because she had no good reason for her change of mind.

"They call me hypochondriac," she said, with an unspeakable expression of melancholy; "but I only fear a burden that I shall be unable to shake off."

"Your mind is perfectly clear," said Faustine; "you understand yourself. Have you spoken to Feldern as reasonably as to me?"

"So often; but he does not understand. Men have not our delicacy."

"We have more tact and finer perceptions, but when a man loves—and that happens oftener than we women will admit," said Faustine, the sudden thought of Audlau filling her with tenderness, "I believe they can learn to approach a woman like a sensitive plant and to understand her thoroughly, and to feel as quickly as we do the approach of the slightest discord. Love gradually inspires this divination—but it must be *love*."

"Feldern loves me—he says."

"Yes, yes," said Faustine, quickly, and a shade of Cunigunde's melancholy fell upon her. Memory swept over her its sad dreams. "Men love in many ways, and there is one that makes us more wretched than ever would their hate. Of that kind I will not speak," she almost whispered; "I could only curse it." She covered her face with her hands and then threw her head back suddenly, tossing the hair from her forehead, as if to rise from a flood of remembrances, or as if wishing to wipe out some haunting ghost of the past. "Don't be frightened, child, at my words," she begged, sweetly. "I have a fever in me sometimes. It gives me golden dreams and also hideous nightmare. Ah, well, this last comes more and more rarely. Let us talk of you. What will be the attitude of your family toward you if you break your engagement?"

"I will have to break with them at the same time. My mother is unaccustomed to disobedience and she desires my marriage."

"And?" asked Faustine, as Cunigunde paused.

"I have no prospects and no hopes; my future is impenetrable to me. It seems only battle and trouble. In a marriage with Feldern I shall find only misery."

"Ah," said Faustine, "your life *looks* happy. How little we know of each other's troubles! There

seems to be some poison in every fate, and we cannot save each other. How powerless is the experience of one to help another!"

They talked long, like old friends. It was a comfort to the girl's reticence to speak so freely. She stayed all day with Faustine. She sang to her, and not in that cold, soulless voice with which she had once sung in acquiescence with her lover's wish, but as people sing when the heart overflows.

Faustine, listening to her, wondered how she could help the maiden. She wondered if Audlau would disapprove of her interference in such a delicate matter; then, if she was doing Feldern any injustice. "He must know the truth," she said to herself. And just as she thought of him he came in.

Cunigunde changed instantly—became embarrassed, shy and haughty. She left the piano, breathless and disconcerted.

"I don't see why my father doesn't come for me. It is late," she said.

Fortunately, Herr von Stein soon arrived. He would have accepted Faustine's graceful invitation to remain to dinner had not his daughter objected. She begged Faustine to allow her to come another time when she would find her alone, and made her adieux.

"How do you find Cunigunde, countess?" asked Feldern, expectingly.

"As beautiful as she is lovable and reasonable."

"Reasonable! Then she hasn't been honest with you."

"Yes, she has."

"She is ashamed of her folly?"

"Feldern," cried Faustine, with violence, "the folly of that child is melancholy wisdom."

"Take care you don't mistake her vague sentimentality for the force of feeling."

"Cunigunde is calm and collected enough—as far as any girl of twenty can be. She does not choose to marry a man she does not love, and I call that reasonable."

"She was willing to do so for four long years."

"Rather say during those years she has fathomed her mistake."

"How often is it allowed a woman to make such mistakes?" asked Feldern, bitterly.

"Allowed—never; to be forgiven—always," she answered very gently.

Feldern was silent, and this earnest interview was interrupted by the unwelcome entrance of Clemens, who, casting an angry glance on Feldern and a reproachful one at Faustine, drew forth a chair, sat down and asked, irritably:

“Do I disturb you?”

“Yes,” said Faustine.

“Our conversation can be taken up again at any moment,” said the good-natured Feldern, coming to the rescue.

“I am thankful,” said Clemens. “I have been besieging your door, in vain, twice to-day—at noon and at four. I was told you were out. Now when I passed your house and saw a light in your windows, I ventured again, expecting again, however, the same answer.”

“But you were mistaken, as you generally are,” said Faustine, indifferently, passing over his impertinence, while Feldern sat speechless and all eyes. She turned to the latter and engaged him at once in a conversation upon general topics. A moment’s pause gave Clemens an opportunity to ask, humbly :

“You have been ill to-day, Countess Faustine?”

“No, I am perfectly well,” she replied coldly, and once more addressed Feldern, with a remark upon the wearisome chatter of a woman of their acquaintance.

“How she misuses words,” she said, “and what an exaggeration and waste of adjective! Why can’t people understand that this only weakens everything they say? When a person who writes

to me, 'Ini,' or 'Dear Ini,' suddenly addresses me, 'My dear Faustine,' I know what to expect—at last, 'Honored countess'—and the end of the correspondence."

"Has that ever happened to you?" asked Clemens, unwisely trying to mingle in the talk from which Faustine seemed determined to exclude him. She would not look at him, and, beside himself, Clemens could only regret the childish explosion of his jealous anger. When they were alone Faustine rose.

"Good night, Herr von Waldorf," she said to the young fellow, who sat rooted to his chair.

"'Herr von Waldorf?'" he asked, bewildered.

"Yes, I mean you."

"And what have I done to you that you treat me like a stranger and dismiss me—except hang the whole day about your door-step?"

"You have done nothing to me—know this once for all. The affront does not hurt me, but yourself. Your *mauvais ton* is worse for you than for me. It simply proves an extraordinary lack of refinement. I could treat you like a child and forbid you every improper word, if it were not too fatiguing to play nurse to a grown-up man. As I don't care to do this, I will receive you henceforth in the most formal way, and perhaps you will then remember the

limits you seem so disposed to overstep. You can imagine that a person who forces me to this must sooner or later become distasteful to me. Men are by nature stupid and tiresome enough, and if they have acquired neither tact nor manners, heaven defend me from their society."

Clemens wrung his hands.

"How can a word spoken in jest—"

"No one understands jesting better than I," interrupted Faustine, "and I therefore understand very well that you were not in jest, or else your jest falls into the absurd."

She laughed, and Clemens cried, relieved :

"God be thanked !"

"I am such a good friend to my friends," said the young woman, in her low, dreamy tones once more. "Don't force me to be a taskmaster—that is for one's enemies."

"Oh, you are an angel of heaven !" cried Clemens, transported, seizing her hand— "but," as Faustine withdrew it, "so cruel !"

"Have you ever seen any other man grab my hand in this way?" asked Faustine, beginning to feel annoyed.

"No ; but no one loves you as I do."

"Everybody loves me better than you do. Others try not to displease and tire me."

"But could you not make a little difference for one?"

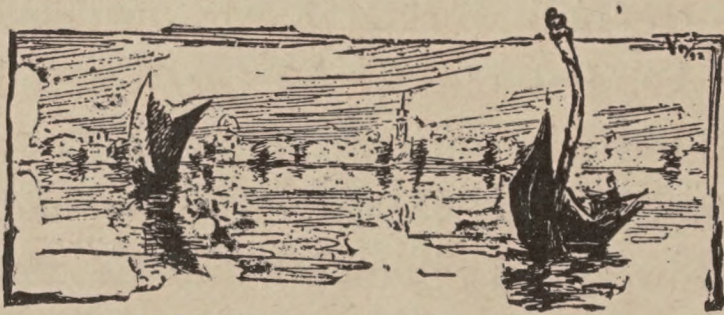
"And why, pray?"

"Because he loves you."

"That does not suffice. I may not reciprocate it."

She sat on the sofa, buried in its depths, toying with a ring she drew back and forth on her finger, her head half turned away from him.

"So far away—so far away," thought Clemens. The young fellow felt suddenly a sense of distance and isolation. "She cannot love."





CHAPTER XVIII.

Mengen also complained the next day of Faustine's barred doors, but in quite a different tone. A half-hour with her gave him a pleasure that lasted for twenty-four hours; but he could not expect to see her as often as he wished. Yet the longing for her presence grew.

He had undertaken to fill the place of minister, as well as his own, during his summer absence. He had worked hard; but he did not dislike work. His old fretful *chef* often sought him and wanted his society; and then there had been the claims of the world, before he had met Faustine. Now all was changed, and he found himself begrudging every moment, so precious when passed near her. He discovered a new charm in her, a new attraction every time they met; in others, nothing. The talk of others all seemed a weary monotony. About her there was a depth—no shallowness. In that abundant gayety and grace one

always guessed at earnestness. A peculiar blending of the highest civilization and the most entire simplicity. At first she had astonished him a little, and then enchanted.

He found her usually reading, writing or painting. Suddenly she would throw away all these like a schoolgirl.

"I would rather talk than think. Come, let us have a nice chat."

He felt himself, in crossing her threshold, to have entered into a new region; but it was as if he had come into the possession of a long-expected inheritance. She seemed to fill all the vain longings of an empty past.

It is true some of the reports about Faustine would unpleasantly cross his mind at times, but he dismissed them skeptically. The world always gossiped, and he found no courage to question her. Perhaps he shrank from the possibility of pain.

"Why question such a frank creature upon what she will herself tell me some day, unasked?"

Of Audlau, Faustine had never spoken to him. She was not one to explain her actions; when they displeased, she never excused herself. Others must excuse her. She used to say: "We had better not offend again than waste words in idle apologies."

Indeed, of Audlau she spoke to very few persons,

and very rarely. She had acquired this invaluable wisdom. Perhaps she, too, feared pain.

Once Mengen found her poring over a map of Egypt. He asked her what she was studying.

"My journey to the East," she replied, and unfolding her plans she asked him if he would like to join the party. He joyfully accepted; and she grew enthusiastic over the delight which this journey would give her.

"A friend of Baron Audlau is living in Alexandria, so he writes to me to-day, and he is the pyramid of my Egyptian hopes."

"If Herr von Audlau is of your party I should be quite a superfluous addition," said Mengen, coldly, "and I dare say you will dispense with me."

"Would you not enjoy the tour," asked Faustine, sweetly, "and can I have too many friends?"

"You make a slave of me—not a friend."

"If I do that you are right to free yourself; but indeed I do it quite unconsciously."

"Ah, well! It is far nicer to be a slave near you than a freeman elsewhere."

"Don't fancy that I shall thank you for such a silly compliment. I hate slaves, and only want a willing service. If I have infringed upon your liberties, pray resume them. I don't keep you." She made a deprecating gesture with her hand.

“ ‘Unconsciously’—you yourself have said it.”

“Very well, then don’t complain. Either break your fetters or stop rebelling.”

“Have you then, really, been always so strong in every moment, all your life?”

“My life has been monotonous and quiet enough; it was only once I was forced to take an irrevocable decision. I had a right to it. Since then, thank God, I have had no further resolutions to make—very disagreeable things with us women.”

“Absolute self-control—the character that always acts and sees wisely—it is superhuman.”

“So be it,” she said; “I don’t doubt it would be yours in emergency. Mengen, if your honest face is not the expression—not in accord with your nature, it would sadden me. You dare not lie. I don’t mean a vulgar, common lie, but the word which promises and does not fulfill. Is it not so? Will you not always be what I believe you?”

She leaned forward and looked for an instant into his eyes, and her glance touched him as the sunrise touches the sea. He would have liked to kneel before her and to vow to her an endless homage, but controlled himself, and contented himself with a light pressure of his lips upon the delicate hand that lay so near him. Then she said to him:

“I have understood your vow, and I accept it.”

“And now,” said Mengen, forcing himself to conceal his agitation, “you must give me some little token; something that will never leave me, that I may remember.”

“Oh, certainly! The Duke Christian of Brunswick wore a glove of Elizabeth von der Pfalz in his cap. My yellow glove would make a charming effect on your black hat!”

Mario got up and passed into the next room. There was a little Etruscan *coupé* on which were lying a number of rings. He took the toy up and brought it to Faustine. She let the contents slip through her fingers.

“Do you like this ring?” she asked. It was a quaint design; a pearl was set very deeply into a circle of heavy gold, which bore the device, “*Qui me cherche me trouve.*”

For an answer, Mengen took it from her and passed it on his finger, but she stopped him.

“You have put it on a finger from which another ring will some day banish it; put it where it may always be left. I am capricious, I must have my own place, no matter how insignificant.”

“As you will,” replied Mario. “I was only intending to say that no place ever could be disputed to you.”

“Of course, as long as I don’t come within the

orbit of some other star. See how nicely it looks on your little finger !”

“ Now tell me the history of the ring,” he said, looking down at it and not at her, with a strange expression upon his lips.

“ It has none,” she laughed. “ I had it made for myself some years ago, and I wore it three days and then threw it aside. It merely expressed my mood at the time. I thought then that people’s hearts were like sunken pearls—that no one looked for them. I was mistaken; divers do, and so—the pearl belongs to them.”

Such happiness filled the young man’s mind that he forgot how depressed he had been when first he had come to her.

But Faustine was less content. After he had gone she asked herself if Audlau would have liked this ring given away. In his presence it would have been nothing; but—in his absence— She quieted her uneasiness by promising herself to write him all about it the next morning.

“ It was such a simple thing,” she said to herself, “ but I am so accustomed to making a clean breast of everything to Max, that it absolutely lies on me like a load. It is really ridiculous to live as I do, and certainly it has been nice to have Mengen here.”

If the interest she found in Mario’s society should

outlive Audlau's return—and, if it did not, the wrong she might be doing the former never entered her mind. It seemed to her quite her right, too, to take or throw away this new pleasure, and she saw in it no danger.

Who can fathom the inconsequences that lurk in the recesses of our human hearts? If one were to accuse Faustine of coquetry one might perhaps be doing her an injustice. Life to her was only worth the living in that she wanted to hew out of its hardness the beautiful God of her imagination, and if she held every new influence as a hammer-stroke in the task, why accuse her of the faintest touch of fickleness? She had no patience with inaction—with useless, morbid repining. She longed to understand, to know, to see. Where there was so much beauty, who would be blind? She hated hypocrisy. New acquaintances and their necessary train of new experience were accepted as from higher hands. She intended to wrong no one. No existence is so lonely that a foreign thread may not become interwoven and entangled in its own, and if sometimes it must be broken when the knot is untied who is to blame?

The letter to Audlau, however, was not exactly such as Faustine had intended. While writing she was interrupted by the excited entrance of Madame

von Stein. Faustine received this lady very courteously, but was at once assailed with undisguised reproaches. She was told her influence over Cuni-gunde had been most unfortunate. It had only strengthened the girl in her resolve.

"I gave her no advice," said Faustine, a trifle haughtily. "She was with me a short time and seemed very decided. I did tell her that I did not believe her to be ill. Perhaps this gave her more strength of purpose."

"It is all nonsense," said the angry mother. "What does the child wish or expect? She has cast her sisters in the shade always. She has been an endless disadvantage to them. I must see things as they are. My daughters are portionless and here is an excellent man. No; this is pure wickedness on her part."

"She suffers, I think," said Faustine.

"Suffers! Yes, of course she suffers, because we are disappointed in her; but let her come to her senses and she will be happy again soon enough. Why, she can do anything she pleases with Feldern, as any clever woman can with any man."

"Lead us not into temptation," said Faustine, very low, in a tone that made Frau von Stein start. The two women looked at each other.

After an embarrassed silence, "Ah, it is sweet

to influence and control a man one loves," said the Countess Obernau, "but to govern one who is hateful to us is a horror and a degradation. It can only be done through the deceit of the woman or the sensuality of the man, and to impose such a destiny—would not that be terrible? When all the world says a man is happy, and he himself says so, even though it may be through her, I still say that such a marriage is degrading. It does not degrade her before the world—oh, no! What does the world know? But before herself! Be pitiful to your child, madame; don't lead her into temptation."

Madame von Stein did not find Faustine's words very palatable.

"Our ideas are so entirely opposed, countess," said the elder woman, "and our views of life are so different, that I must be pardoned if I do not wish my daughter to avail herself of your permission to visit you. You are as *exaltée* as she is."

"Am I never to see Cunigunde again?" asked Faustine, sadly. "She seemed to find pleasure in being with me."

"I cannot understand," replied Frau von Stein, somewhat sharply, "what interest you can find in my daughter."

"I like loveliness."

“It looks a trifle bad for you to excite disturbance.”

“The reproach is undeserved.”

She spoke so gently that Frau von Stein was suddenly filled with a sense of the young woman's charm, and left her, somewhat pacified, although unmovable in what she persisted in considering Cunigunde's caprice.





CHAPTER XIX.

The next day a letter came to Faustine. It was from Cunigunde.

“Most beautiful one,” it ran, “mamma says I am not to see you any more. I am very unhappy, and all through my own folly. I am only a burden upon my family. Oh, cannot you help me? You have never asked a favor for yourself. Could you for me? Do you think my simple accomplishments could be of any assistance to me? Would any of your influential friends take pity upon me and some interest on my behalf? If I could only make for myself an independent position! I know that I am insignificant and inexperienced, but— I turn to you for counsel and assistance.”

Faustine read the note with attention, and wrote a brief account of Cunigunde’s story to Audlau, inclosing the girl’s letter. When she had sealed hers, she suddenly remembered the affair of the ring had not been mentioned, but it was late, and she sent it to the post. She also entirely forgot to keep an engagement with Clemens, whom she had promised to meet at the basin of the Grossen Garten, to look at

the skaters and let him draw her on his sledge. She only remembered it when he called late that evening, but she did not receive him, as she was dressing for a ball.

When, half an hour later, she was entering the brilliant assembly, Mengen and Feldern were talking together near the doorway. The former, in spite of an affected interest in the conversation, was narrowly watching the entrance door, while Feldern seemed doubly dejected. His final acceptance of Cunigunde's decision had not lessened his inclination for her.

"*Au revoir*," said Mengen, suddenly; "we will talk over this later."

"Not this evening," said Feldern, following Mario's eyes, which had seen Faustine beforehand. She stood a moment at the door where a throng of lookers-on were staring at the dancers. She was dressed in some pale, creamy stuff, that hung in soft and shadowy folds. She looked more fragile than usual.

Elbowing his way through the throng, Mengen soon had reached her side.

"What a lovely, discontented, little face you bring to our ball!" he said.

"It is very disagreeable that all troubles are so unbecoming."

“Ah, no mourning to-night,” he prayed; “I am so happy—it lingers from yesterday. I have news from my home too—my little sister is to be married to a long-loved suitor. They have had all manner of difficulties, and now—at last—the goal is reached—happiness has come.”

“Oh, rather say the trouble is over. Whether happiness has come is questionable.”

“You hope it, nevertheless. Will you waltz?”

“I hate gay people to-night.”

“I am not gay, I am only happy.”

“When happiness can interest itself in everything, I call it merely merriment.”

“Well, how will you have me to please you?”

“Sympathetic,” she said; and tears welled suddenly into her eyes.

Mengen grew pale. His teasing, which only had been intended to distract her from the trouble which he had instantly detected in her face, had really hurt her then. He drew her arm through his and led her to a quiet place in a deep window.

“What has happened to you?” he said.

She spoke to him of Cunigunde’s position, and her annoyance at finding herself unable to help the girl, while held more or less responsible for her final dismissal of Feldern.

“Can you do anything for her?” she asked.

Mengen was relieved to find Faustine had no personal trouble, and proud of her confidence and request.

"Now, do me the pleasure of being immensely interested in my sister Matilde's engagement," he said.

"How can I be," she pouted, "when I never saw her?"

"Because her marriage will leave my younger sister alone, and I will have to find a companion for her."

"Mengen, my dear friend, is this really true?"

"I don't know a better than Fräulein von Stein."

"I cannot thank you enough," said Faustine, and a sudden sense of this man's kindness, of her own loneliness, and a certain tremor of the nerves, which she could neither fathom nor control, caused the tears which had gathered on her lashes to fall down on her clasped hands.

"How beautiful you are!" said Mengen, quickly and low.

"I am nothing," she said.

"It is angelic," he replied, "to grieve and rejoice for another as you have to-night. How selfish and cold other people must seem to you."

He leaned forward a little, as if to breathe in the perfume of her hair.

"You must write directly," said Faustine, eagerly, and trying to avoid his eyes. "Will they ask much of the companion?"

"She must be musical," he laughed.

"Cunigunde is that. She sings charmingly."

"I heard her once; but I must confess she did not touch me."

"*Bref, elle joue et elle chante, c'est l'essentiel.* Oh, I am delighted that your sister Matilde is going to be happy."

"Shall we waltz?"

Faustine rarely danced.

"One cannot whirl in that way all the evening. Fancy having to laugh hours together. It's just as silly," she would say. She danced now once with Mengen to give him the pleasure; but to all other requests she said: "You come too late."

"I forgot everything to-day," Faustine said to Mengen, a little later, as he still lingered. "I forgot something I intended writing in a letter; I forgot a run on Clemens Waldorf's sledge, and I forgot my dinner."

"You really need some one to look after you, Countess Faustine; how else shall you ever go through life?"

"I am sure I find it disagreeable enough."

"I can't offer you any substitute for the lost din-

ner; but won't you let me push you on the ice a little while to-morrow?"

"I am in a very merciful mood toward you to-night, and can deny you nothing. I cannot frame the word 'no.' "

"Are you unable to say 'no' to any other?"

"Oh, I haven't given away all my independence; but, to tell you the truth, I hate 'yes' and 'no,' and they are so senseless to people who understand each other. Why ask, for instance: 'Do you love me?' "

She regretted the words almost as soon as spoken, and flushed a little, but continued hastily:

"Can't people know it? Ah, well, men, I think, after all, need the reassurance less than we women."

Mario took her fan and played with it absently.

"Oh, as to that," he said, "you leave us so often in the dark as to your feelings, and seem to find such an enormous satisfaction in coquetries with others, that we might be pardoned an occasional doubt. You have less cause."

"Men are assuredly touchingly simple," said Faustine, lightly. "I do think their vanity makes them more trusting than we are; and if they doubt they disguise their tragic sufferings well enough."

"I won't discuss our merits with you; but I must

remain of the opinion that a man is more capable than a woman of an absorbing passion."

"For play—for money—for fame—for some hobby—yes, that I believe."

"No; I mean the passion that you are thinking about."

"How do you know what I think about?"

"You must think of love, because that is your essence."

"Well, for women, too, then."

"Not for *women*, Countess Faustine, but for one woman."

"Oh, yes, I remember now. Only men, in your eyes, are capable of any enthusiasm. You are never inconsequent—that is a woman's province."

"Oh, they are practical enough as a balance to caprice."

"Caprice is not always false."

"Put your hand on your heart, *contessa mia*, and tell me if you think perfect confidence can be rested on anything so uncertain, variable and inscrutable as a woman. Now here, this girl—this proud Cuni-gunde—are you sure that she will always have the noble aspirations of to-day?"

"No," said Faustine, hesitatingly; "but show me the man who finishes as he began."

"Ah, well, when a man's woof is broken, he does

not, at least, immediately add a thread of another color."

"Let us hope, at least, that you do not; but, tell me, why do you have such a poor opinion of women?"

"Far be such a sin from me."

"Well, but really, did one ever sow the seed of mistrust in you?"

"Do you think so, because I have these vague fears? No—countess—I never gave my whole heart to anything and have never been betrayed; but—I *feel* in them that weakness, and perhaps should love the most one in whom I secretly suspected it."

There was a moment's silence.

"How unlike most men of the world he is," thought Faustine.

The music sounded to her far and faint.

Others came to greet her.

"I see Lady Geraldine," said Mengen, "and must speak a word to her."

Faustine looked at him.

"Do you like her?" she inquired.

"Don't you wish me to leave you?" he asked, with a sudden delight at the flattery in her sweet tone.

"No," she said.

They stood together while others came and went.

"Tell me about your sisters," she asked, presently, trying to shake off a certain dangerous languor that was creeping over them.

"My sister Marie is eighteen, rather clever and very pretty, with light hair and brown eyes."

"What a dry description!"

"Ah! How can I talk to you about others? I either want to listen to you or talk to you about yourself."

"Heavens! What a bore for me!"

"I don't believe it. I am sure you take an enormous interest in yourself."

"We must respect ourselves," she laughed, "if we expect others to do so."

"The moral of which is that a little refined egotism is an excellent thing."

They talked lightly, but her influence was strong upon him. As Clemens had once asked himself, so did Mario: "Could she really love? Would not she give her enchantments only for a moment to withdraw them?"

So the night drew on. It was two o'clock. Faustine suggested that she would go home. Mario went in search of her servant, but the search was vain; he was nowhere to be found.

"Such a thing never happened before. What can it mean? The man must be ill. Do you think any-

thing has happened to him?" Faustine asked, anxious and annoyed, and not knowing what to do. "Perhaps he has absconded with all my possessions. Well, they are not numerous."

"My *coupé* is at the door and is entirely at your disposal. I will see you home," said Mengen.

"Ah, thanks, my good friend. That will solve the difficulty," said Faustine.

He enveloped her in his fur-lined evening coat and led her down the stairs.

"I can give you Cunigunde's letter, then, to-night," she said. "When can we have an answer?"

"Oh, in a very few days."

"I will only speak of this to Cunigunde if the reply is favorable."

Faustine's house was soon reached, and her maid met her, as usual, in the ante-chamber.

"Where is Ernest?" asked the countess.

"He left an hour ago to meet you, Madame la Comtesse; but Herr von Waldorf is still here."

"What an idea, Jeanette, to permit visitors to come in at such an hour!" cried Faustine, extremely vexed.

"It was Ernest's doing, not mine, Madame la Comtesse."

Faustine hastily pushed open her drawing-room door. A lamp burned low in the large apartment.

In its remotest recess sat Clemens, buried in a deep chair, his arms on his knees and his face buried in his hands.

“Herr von Waldorf!” exclaimed Faustine, angrily.

He looked up at her as if bewildered.

“I believe he was asleep,” she whispered, half impatiently, half laughingly, to Mario.

“I believe that it was good for him,” muttered Mario under his breath, shaking the young fellow’s arm rather roughly. “Will you come with me? The countess is tired after the ball, and we are *de trop* here.”

“You are, perhaps,” murmured Clemens, and then addressing Faustine over Mario’s shoulder: “You come here at this hour and in this dress—what does it mean?”

Faustine was staggered at the quiet with which Mengen took Clemens’s answer; still more so when he drew from her shoulders his coat, which still hung about them, and restrained the word which was springing to her lips.

“To-morrow the countess will tell you all about the ball. To-night it is really too late. Come with me, my good Waldorf.”

“I cannot understand you,” she said. “How can you—?”

"We must be indulgent to him ; I am afraid he has been drinking."

Faustine repressed a cry of fear, and seized Mario's hand. This roused Waldorf's rage, and he approached her, deathly pale.

"Why are you afraid of me?" he thundered forth.

"I am not," she said, hastily ; but her arm leant on Mario's, and he felt her tremble. He wished to put an end at once to this painful scene.

"If you will give me that letter, we will say good night."

Faustine went quickly into her room. He followed her to the door. From its threshold in a moment she handed the note to him, then re-entered, closed it and turned the key. He felt a pain shoot through his heart, as sudden as it was inexplicable—the sense of being left in the cold without even a whispered good-night.





CHAPTER XX.

Clemens had established himself upon the sofa, drawing a cushion half under his head. Mario took up his own hat and coat.

“Are you ready, Herr von Waldorf?”

“No, I am waiting for the Countess Faustine. She shall give me an explanation of why she broke her word to me this morning, and this evening had me sent away.”

“But she has shut herself up in her room ; a sign that we can go.”

Clemens did not move. Mengen fearing high words, and that Faustine's peace might again be disturbed, sat down, too. When Clemens saw this, he said, angrily :

“By what right do you remain here?”

“Since you have established a watch outside of this lady's door, I shall give myself the same pleasure.”

"The whole night?"

"The whole night."

"It will be cold enough."

"I have my coat."

"Two are not needed at the post; one is enough."

"Don't you think on this occasion *one* is too many?"

After a silence, Clemens murmured:

"I wish it were time to rest, and that everything were well."

"Come, come," said Mario, touching his shoulder gently, "let us have a talk together. Come with me."

He finally persuaded the young man to accompany him, and thankfully delivered him into the custody of his valet. From Waldorf's domicile he returned to the ball, in quest of Faustine's servant. His own footman had seen the man shockingly intoxicated, so he left him to the search, and went home, bidding his servant bring Ernest to him when found.

Two hours later, Ernest, already partly sobered, appeared with his mistress's furs still hanging on his arm, and much abashed at Mengen's frowning countenance.

"Who enticed you to such conduct?" asked the latter, sternly.

"Herr von Waldorf, your excellency," stammered the culprit.

"Don't lie to me!"

"Upon my honor, if I can speak like an aristocrat," stammered Ernest, "he bade me go to the ball for my lady and gave me ten *friedrichs-d'or*. He said he was expected to wait for her at our house. I waited a long while. It was very cold. A wine-room was near. I drank some glasses of champagne—it may have been bottles—I didn't count. Time passes quickly so."

"Don't go near Countess Obernau to-day," said Mengen. "My man will take you with him to sleep off this drunken spree. But leave your mistress's cloak here; don't dare drag it about with you."

Ernest deposited the cloak upon a chair and stumbled out in deep dejection.

Mengen, when left alone in his apartment, took up the cloak and held and looked at it with a sense of joy, as if the greatest treasure of the world had fallen into his hands. It was of rich brocade. On a ground of gold were deep red flowers, poppy-hued. It was lined with a darker plush and edged with soft black fur. It was warm and light, and so made as not to disorder the toilet—soft and delicious in the close contact. To Mario's fantasy it seemed as though her pretty head still rose from out the

dark fur, like a star from out the evening sky ; and the graceful, slight figure seemed to be still resting under the rich folds, and her hands drawing them about her tall form. He buried his glowing face deeply in the garment, about which hung some faint fragrance of her sweetness, and its softness seemed to lie like kisses upon his lips. With a sudden violence he threw the thing from him. He felt little inclination to sleep and sat down to write.

He began a letter to his father. Hardly had he written a half-dozen lines when his eyes fell once more on the cloak, which lay still upon the floor.

“That is no place for what she wears,” said Mario, rising, and taking up the cloak with tenderness, kissing it as if to beg its pardon for his cruelty, he sat down again at his desk, keeping it across his knees. He began once more to write rapidly of Cunigunde, with such heartiness and earnestness that he already felt certain of the reply.

“That was a good day,” he said, half aloud, sealing the letter. “I have seen the angel in her glory, and I was permitted to serve her.”

Before he slept he buried his head in the beloved cloak, speaking idle and foolish words to it, and through his dream Faustine wept and smiled.



CHAPTER XXI.

Clemens awoke early, his head aching, his mind a desert. The last evening seemed some horrid nightmare. He tried to remember. He called his servant, a stalwart villager whom he had brought from Oberwaldorf.

"Johann," he asked, "who came home with me?"

"I do not know, *gnädiger Herr*."

"I was not alone?"

"No, sir. A tall gentleman—as tall as you are, only thinner—came with you."

"Was I ill, Johann?"

"*Na, gnädiger Herr*, not just that," said Johann, with stupid laughter.

"Jesus, Maria!" said Clemens. "And she saw me! Am I, then, possessed with a spirit of evil? Cannot I touch a drop of wine any more without such a disaster?"

"*Na, gnädiger Herr*," said Johann, soothingly. "I think it must have been more than a drop."

"I will dress myself," said the unfortunate Clemens.

He did so in fury and hastened to Mengen's. He wished to know if he had in any way hurt Faustine, and for how much of her displeasure he could thank his detested rival.

Mengen had not yet risen, but Clemens would not be stopped. He pushed his way into Mengen's bedroom and drew the curtain of his bed with a violent jerk.

Mengen, suddenly awakened and bewildered at this most unlooked-for intrusion, half rose upon one arm and confronted Clemens. Faustine's cloak fell from the disordered bed to the floor.

Clemens had grown livid. His teeth chattered in his head. Mengen, suddenly remembering the young man's last night's escapade, and thinking he had himself come for an explanation, spoke in a friendly tone.

"That sort of thing may pass once, dear Waldorf, but—"

"The devil take you!" cried Clemens, blind with anger. "That cloak belongs—"

"To the Countess Faustine," said Mario, with icy coldness, but inwardly shaken with a sudden dismay and cursing his own thoughtlessness.

"And that you don't even deny!" stammered Clemens.

“Why should I?” said Mario, affecting a coldness he by no means felt.

“Oh, Faustine! Faustine!” lamented Clemens, pacing the floor of the room.

“Herr von Waldorf, may I ask an explanation of this unwarranted intrusion? Your conduct of yesterday was to be understood and excused, but this morning it is neither one nor the other. Let me know at once your errand here.”

“Count Mengen, how came this cloak here?”

“An answer to that question I owe to the Countess Obernau—not to you. That I shall give this answer to her without delay you will know later. But I beg you not to weigh the respect and homage I give to this lady by the measure of your own, which has shown itself to be so wanting in consideration and discretion.”

Clemens felt that no further satisfaction would be gained by prolonging this interview, which was placing him in a ridiculous position. He consequently stopped Mario short and left him with a muttered curse. He hastened to the promenade, where he took up his beat under Faustine’s windows. Possibly she might see him and speak to him.

The day broke brilliantly into Faustine’s darkened room, shining across her closed eyelids. She woke, but was yet half dreaming. She felt happy.

She did not know why. "It must be about Cuni-gunde," she reflected.

After Clemens had been pacing up and down some time, he decided in his anguish to pay Faustine a call, making no allusion to what had passed, just to see how she would receive him.

"God!" he thought, "if only she does not care for this Mengen. It is this that makes her so indifferent to me. In Oberwaldorf she was different—Not different to me, not more friendly—but I could not imagine her more so to any other man, unless, indeed, to Audlau. Yes, even her supposed sentiment for Audlau did not wound me so much—not so deeply—not so bitterly, as this. I do not make any chimeras for myself; I only ask her to pardon and suffer me. Will she repel me, while she lavishes her fancy upon this Mengen, the devil only knows to what degree?"

He so worked up his anger and his passion, that when he came before Faustine he was exhausted, and had not a word. She thought him mortified at his unfortunate plight of the night before, and in pity decided to ignore the subject.

"I am glad you came early; I feared you would not pardon my yesterday's thoughtlessness."

She told him of the reasons which had detained her from fulfilling her engagement with him. She



CLEMENS SAT IN A CHAIR, HIS FACE BURIED IN HIS HANDS.—See Page 167.

spoke of the ball and how much it amused her, and how brilliant it all had been. She then just touched upon her promise to meet Mengen on the ice—all so simply, lightly and naturally, as one does in trying to put another at ease. But Clemens was too excited and irritated to be open to this influence. He only saw a clever ruse.

It is often more flattering to be rebuked for a misdemeanor than to be treated with lenient indifference. It is only very young and inexperienced people who mistake kindness for love; Clemens had grown old and wise in few hours. He covered his face with his hands and remained speechless before her, overwhelmed with the conflict of his sufferings.

Her first impulse was to draw away from him, half-indignant that he should not lend himself with more tact to her avoidance of a scene. But there was something so dispirited in the young man's attitude, that she forced herself to remain near him, and even touched the hand that covered his eyes—

“My poor Clemens,” she said. “Let it pass.”

He pushed away the light touch and looked at her.

“You make God lie!” he said. “Yes, yes, the mask has fallen.” And as Faustine, shocked and frightened, moved quickly from his side: “When

I first saw your beautiful face I thought God's angel had been sent into the world—a messenger from Him. But this sweetness was a lie; there was nothing, only a woman—after all—a lie!”

Faustine looked very tall as she stood facing him. Quickly and quietly she left him, trailing her light garments across his feet. She sat down at her desk and began to write. About a quarter of an hour passed; then Clemens, in his misery, followed her and stood at the door.

“If I am a criminal,” he said, “answer me one question before the death-blow.”

“You are a madman,” she said, wearily laying down her pen.

“Did you not return here last evening in Count Mengen's company?”

“Yes.”

“His coat over your shoulders?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“Because my cloak and my servant had vanished, and are still among the missing.”

“I beg your pardon, your cloak has not vanished. I saw it two hours since.”

“Where?”

“Where? you ask— Countess, have you the courage?”

"Heaven," she cried, impatiently; "is it hanging on the weather-cock of the Catholic cathedral, or has it ridden through the air with some new Faust?"

"It is in Count Mengen's room, across his bed."

"Why, I am so pleased! Then he must have found Ernest. I was quite anxious, and I am so fond of that cloak. I was afraid it was lost. Now, Herr von Waldorf, you may continue your examination."

However, she blushed a little.

"It is ended."

"That is too bad."

"Why?"

"Because I have not been able to administer the desired death-blow or scatter your wild illusions to the winds. You look petrified, but convinced of nothing."

He fell at her feet.

"Have pity, Faustine. Jealousy has bereft me of my reason—love, of my judgment. Oh, tell me at least that Mengen is no happier than I am."

"I hope that he is, from my soul's depth," she said almost solemnly.

He was goaded by his torments. He would, at all cost, stab her into some feeling.

"I don't doubt it," he said, "and surely, last evening, he had reason to feel satisfied."

He spoke with a ring of sarcasm.

A look of profound sadness overshadowed Faustine's delicate face.

"Clemens!" she said; and in her tone there lurked something that made the tears spring to the young man's eyes.

"Forgive!" he cried, looking into hers with trembling and dog-like humiliation.

"Oh," she said, "it is not I you have wounded unto death, but yourself—the purity of your own feeling. Get up! Go! You surely will never have the audacity or the courage to raise your eyes to mine again. I will never see you again. Leave me! Go!"

"Have mercy, Faustine!" breathed Clemens, his forehead against her feet. But with unspeakable disgust she spurned him from her.

When Faustine was alone once more she burst into passionate tears. She turned to Audlau's picture.

"Max, my friend, will you not come back to me with your protecting comfort?"





CHAPTER XXII.

Her tears were hardly dry when she heard in the ante-chamber Mario's step. It vexed her that she could not tell him the cause of her emotion.

He did not find her greeting very friendly when he entered with the words :

"Dare I ask pardon for the sinner Ernest?"

"He is the cause of everything," she replied.

"Has anything unpleasant happened to you since?" asked Mario, anxiously.

"No, nothing," she said, constrained. "I only mean yesterday—and then, where is my cloak?"

"Ah," thought Mario, "Clemens has already babbled."

"I rescued it last night from Ernest and from the fumes of the servants' hall," he said quietly; "but this morning I delivered it to him again."

"I will have nothing to do with drunken men; I have sent one off this morning, the other may go."

"Dear countess, will you not overlook it?"

"No; Clemens has already disgraced himself, and if it was he who gave money to my servant it does not raise him much in my estimation; I don't like it."

"But I assure you, countess, Ernest is repenting in tears."

"Well, speak to him for me, then; appeal to his conscience and put him upon his oath. I have no talent at lecturing and sermonizing. I admit I don't like to dismiss, for one failure, a servant I have had and trusted so long."

So Mario became a mediator, and he soon succeeded in banishing from Faustine's soul the cause of her annoyance, for she was as impressionable as a child, and, like Atalanta, she was prone to stop and pluck the golden apples that might be scattered on her way. Mario, to distract her, tried to interest her about a marriage that had set the whole town agog, and was looked upon as a *mésalliance* for other reasons than the difference in the social position of the parties.

"The man is an artist?" said Faustine.

"Yes, a worn-out man, without one atom of personal attraction left. What good will his fame do

his wife, and the flattery he receives, when the glamour falls from her own eyes?"

"Oh, well, you know some women like to be proud of a man—to hear him praised and admired—it gives them pleasure."

"Yes, and have him come home enervated, ill-tempered, creeping back into his chrysalis, a discontented caterpillar."

"Oh, women are accustomed to seeing men without much illusion who haven't even beforehand enchanted the world. I suppose the artist temperament exerts a sort of magic. It is certainly fascinating."

"One still asks oneself: 'Will the fascination remain a life-time?' How many men who have lost their heads for actresses and singers have ever found a lasting tie?"

"Lasting ties don't spring from early caprices," said Faustine; "and these fancies generally belong to extreme youth."

"Oh, boy-fancies—those attractions of a moment—they don't bind," said Mario. "One congratulates oneself after on the narrow escape one has had. It is an awful thing to meet again an early flame."

"You doubtless have had much experience," said Faustine, demurely.

"I am afraid of artistic people," said Mario,

earnestly, and not replying to her words—"terribly afraid. One never knows where to find them; one is never sure. Artists are safer in their works." He seemed to wish some assurance from her she would not give.

"Spoken coldly, like a man of the world. You are afraid of what you are not prepared to meet. Ah, well, the artistic nature must be its own reward, and its sacrifices are repaid by unknown treasures. Think of the intoxication a great artist must have in the completion of his masterpiece! How narrow and crude our pleasures seem in comparison; but—it must be hard—afterward—to come back to sober commonplaces."

"We all have to come down to that and be content as best we may; I can, however, imagine no circumstances that would make you commonplace." He continued laughingly: "Teach me how not to fear chaotic uncertainties; I like clearness."

"Come, then, Count Mengen, let us start for the Grosser Garten. Everything is clear enough there; such a blue sky; such a white earth; such sparkling ice; such bare trees. Oh, that clearness—how cold it all is!" She gave a little shiver and went to fetch her wraps. Mengen's eyes followed her.

"I like clearness," he repeated to himself, half aloud, sitting buried in a corner of her sofa. "Well,

why not ! Why not look for it through her—one question—and— She is like the sun. There is no clearness—I dare not.”

Faustine had been ready for some moments and was standing looking at him when he awoke from his reverie.

“I don’t like to disturb people so absorbed,” she said almost shyly. “One does not know from what Eden one may be calling them back.”

“Have no fear; you bring it,” said Mario, with a seriousness differing from his usual tone of light badinage. The mood remained with him as long as they were together. At parting, he said to her :

“And are twenty-four hours to pass before I see you again ?”

“Why not come to-night to Frau von Eilau’s ? I shall be there.”

“I cannot possibly ; I have engagements at the ministry.”

“Then don’t complain.”

“I will come,” he said. He thought he saw that his uncertainty, not his complaint, had vexed her ; and Faustine smiled.

In the evening, one half-hour after the other passed away, but Mario did not arrive at the von Eilaus’. Faustine became impatient, then restless, at last miserable. At first she attributed his non-

appearance to some detaining affairs—that plea, so common to the other sex, and which, in fact, he had mentioned as possible; then to some unforeseen detention; finally, to a calamity. She thought of Clemens.

“God only knows what further folly he may have committed,” she said to herself, and wondered if Mario had rashly allowed himself to be involved. Dark possibilities arose before her. She sank upon a sofa with her head thrown back—a way that she had.

They had music, and it was so excellent that conversation died. When it is mediocre it seems only to give fresh impetus to flimsy nothings. So Faustine remained undisturbed; but the music sounded in her ears like a senseless buzz. She was on the point of leaving the *salon* and of taking refuge in her own home, to conquer, alone, this anguish of expectation, when very quietly, as if to disturb no one, the door opened. It was Mengen. Faustine had so often already turned her eyes toward this door that, discouraged, she would not raise them again. She sat, quite pale, her eyelids lowered and her lips somewhat tremulous. He caught sight of her face with its suggestion of immense disappointment, and stepped quickly to her side.

All eyes turned toward the late comer, but he only saw her, and when, at last, becoming conscious

of his presence, she looked up and recognized him, in an instant she was transformed—radiant, happy, beautiful.

“What had happened to you just now?” he asked.

“I was afraid you were not coming. It seemed so tedious,” she said, in the tone of a tired child.

“Has really nothing else troubled you?”

“Is it nothing to wait an hour and a half, or two hours—and for me, who hate it so? I would not like to inflict that on any human being.”

“I didn’t fix any time. How could I guess?” he answered, manlike.

“Oh, no. No, certainly, you could not guess; but now you know, once for all.”





CHAPTER XXIII.

Feldern came often to see Faustine. She had told him of the letter written for Cunigunde; and the young man had been brought to think it all for the best.

"Since the possibility of seeing her has been taken from me I am glad she should be far away," he said, "I shall breathe more freely and force myself to realize the hopelessness of my attachment. The worst is to have a person at hand and yet be separated. When she is near I want to see her; and if I see her I want her for myself."

"You are very frank, my dear Feldern," Faustine replied. "I have rarely heard you speak openly."

"When one has nothing further to hope or to fear—when one has all or nothing, one becomes candid. You know the bridegroom on his wedding morning says very simply: 'I am happy,' and the

beggar in the street just as simply: 'I am wretched,' and the same language does for joy and misery."

Faustine fancied she recognized in such expressions the influence of Mario—Mario, who always insisted one must bow to the irrevocable.

She wished some one, equally wise, might come to Clemens's aid with helpful counsel; she could and must do no more for him. He had disappeared from out of her life and she might have fancied him gone, but something whispered to her that he would not leave without first seeking a reconciliation. Where could he be? Was he still watching her? Was he spying her steps and actions? What might there not be to fear from his rash passion? Sometimes, when alone, she nervously mistrusted her servants. She often started if she heard voices and steps in her ante-chamber and could not distinguish whose they were. She worked herself up into imaginary fears. But when Mengen was with her she could not confess what then seemed so childish.

It was too repugnant to her to put Mario on Clemens's track. She did not wish to wound the latter further, or to fan his hate. At last when days passed and Clemens gave no sign, she implored Feldern to look for him; she opened her heart to him and told him something of what had passed.

“I myself can’t look for him ; it would seem like encouragement and put me in an impossible light ; but I do feel anxious.”

Feldern promised to do his best and discover if possible, that very day, if Clemens was still in Dresden.

A letter from Audlau did not add greatly to Faustine’s content. He wrote about Cunigunde’s concerns with that cool impartiality insupportable to a person half committed. He said one had better not rashly interfere in other people’s affairs ; things look so differently to-morrow from to-day. He felt that she knew Cunigunde very little ; that to find her a home was a difficult matter ; that the responsibility was great, and small thanks to be had for entangling oneself in family difficulties.

Faustine rebelled a little. She did not think she had been officious or that any of this trouble could fall on herself.

“And what if it did?” she said to herself. “Surely it is no crime to have wished another well.”

Audlau’s answer was certainly neither sympathetic nor to her taste ; it dispirited her. Sometimes when a woman wants to soar, a man seems bent on clipping her wings. If Mario did no better, what was to be done with the girl and the false hopes raised in her mind ?

The chill of Audlau's words was still upon Faustine, when Ernest announced Count Mengen. He came in gayly, an open letter in his hand :

"Cunigunde is welcome," he said. "My mother has sent her servant to fetch her. That is why the letter is somewhat delayed. He brought it to me. Are you pleased?"

He bowed before her and then glanced into her face, which was now once more full of a happy light.

"Oh, Mengen!" she said, with one hand upon her heart, giving him the other. She had felt discouraged and he seemed a God-sent messenger.

He held her hand for a moment with a gesture of infinite devotion, looking for a while into her eyes as if unable to turn away his own. At last he raised her hand to his lips; but it was a homage, and it was hardly a caress.

"Please, Count Mengen," she said, "tell Ernest to procure a messenger at once. I will write to Cunigunde. Perhaps she could start to-morrow. Oh, how glad she will be—how grateful to you!"

"That is absurd, I did this in your service; it had to succeed."

Feldern, in the meanwhile, had gone to Clemens. The stalwart Johann grinned and seemed in doubt whether to admit him; but having acknowledged

that his master was at home he had to open the door. Feldern's fastidiousness was shocked at the disorder that reigned in what might have been called the elegant apartment: wearing apparel on the floor; dishes on the chairs; flasks of wine, cards, the remains of a late breakfast and of half-smoked cigars on the table; fencing swords and pistols on the bed; glasses everywhere; Clemens in a dressing-gown, with unkempt beard, pale as a ghost, haggard, standing in the center of the room with one hand limp at his side, the other thrown up over his head."

"You seem to be in camp here," said Feldern; but somehow the light words did not have a very happy ring.

"Yes," said Clemens, "we have made two days and two nights of it. They have gone off now, heaven knows where—to eat and sleep I suppose; much I care."

"And did you have a very good time?"

"Good? Yes—if you like; noise enough and wine enough and play; but I hope that you are not of the opinion that women are necessary to make the goodness perfect."

"Not at all!"

Feldern looked at Clemens with a bleeding heart. The young man seemed still under the influence of wine—ill—half mentally, half physically.

"Don't you think a little fresh air would do you good? Whew! This hot atmosphere clogs the lungs. You look worn-out."

"I am," said Clemens, and sat down on the edge of the table from which he scattered the cards.

"I thought you must be ill. It is such a long time since we met you at the Countess Faustine's."

"Oh, I am not ill, thank you! I only prefer to lead this merry life."

"It is very well for a day or two, but, my dear fellow, how sick one gets of the fun!"

"As one does of everything in this sublunar world, and first of all, of life."

"You are very young, Waldorf."

"I shall be twenty-two to-morrow, and that is young, but I have grown old in wretchedness this last month—old as the hills."

"Yet you seem to be making an effort at amusement."

"No; at killing time."

"Come out and have a walk with me."

"I must dress first."

"Yes, I should say so; from head to foot."

"Oh, it isn't worth while. Tell me, Herr von Feldern, is anything worth lifting one's little finger for?"

"Yes, your duty, I suppose."

"But if you haven't a duty in the world?"

"What nonsense! There is humanity."

"Bah!" cried Clemens, letting his head fall forward on his breast. "Did any one instigate you to come to me?" he asked, after a pause.

Feldern did not care to lie; besides, there seemed to be something so forlorn, so desolate, in the young fellow's position, that he had no heart to grudge him a small ray of pleasure. He therefore made no answer.

"It is *she*, then, who sent you. *She*, then, thinks of me," cried Clemens, with a sorrowful eagerness. "Well—how could it be otherwise, since I not only think of her, but my whole thought *is* she. Such thoughts must be a net around about her—a net to draw her to me—at last."

He spoke with the eloquence born of deep feeling in the language it teaches to the most simple.

Feldern remembered all that Faustine had said about Waldorf's exaggerated sentiments, and there was a slight tone of sarcasm in the tone of his reply.

"Don't depend upon that. Women are too subtle for our clumsy thoughts to entangle, and so capricious that they are sometimes caught at smaller cost."

"Do you think so? Without an effort? Then you, too, have been hurt by a woman? Oh, the

pain! It is nameless—nameless. And to look for heaven through one of them is to be lost! How queer it is—one passes most women by without a sensation; no heart-beat; no boiling of the blood; no longing to clasp them to one's breast. It is only one; among the others she seems like some beautiful legend amid every-day tales. Tell me, does such a woman make you think of the princess who dropped roses from her lips when she laughed and pearls from her eyes when she cried! Oh, her eyes!"

"All women have eyes," broke in Feldern impatient at this rhapsody; "and it is well to remember it and not fall into monomania. We must feel that a woman has no eyes who has none for us."

"Very true; very philosophical. But, you see, I neglected philosophy at college. Wisdom reduced into a science always looked to me a grand tree trimmed into some fanciful shape; and this reminds me of some fir-trees Countess Obernau sketched at Oberwaldorf, which proves to you that my philosophy begins and ends—with her."

He buried his face in his hands and was silent.

"You are really ill," said Feldern, pityingly. "These miserable days have destroyed your nerves—overheated you. You must come out. Dress yourself quickly and let your servant arrange your rooms."

“As you like,” said Clemens, and called Johann.

Johann’s qualifications not being those of an accomplished valet, the toilet was of long duration. Through the half-opened door of the dressing-room Feldern entertained Waldorf with such topics as he thought might amuse and distract him from his morbid broodings. Clemens, however, remained utterly indifferent to every subject which was not Faustine, and had Feldern asked him some question about the man in the moon, would probably have answered her name.

“I shall die if I do not see her again,” he said when they were once out of the house.

“And what if you do see her again? You behave in such a way that even a woman of the world like the countess, who can adapt herself so well to most people, cannot support you.”

“That is it! Why will she treat me as she does all others?”

“If you expect anything else, then I decline to be mediator.”

“O God, make that she shall see me again, and she may treat me exactly as she likes—only not with disgust and disdain! Tell her to say ‘Dear Clemens,’ not ‘Herr von Waldorf.’ No one ever called me ‘Dear Clemens.’ I lost my parents early; but sometimes she says ‘Dear Clemens.’ To

most people I am Waldorf, you know. When she says it, it is as if a nightingale sang in the winter, and if any one else attempted to call me so I would very soon stop his mouth with a blow. I wonder if one day, perhaps, she will give me her hand? That she never does. I have seen her stroke the head of Mengen's big mastiff so softly, so gracefully. Oh—her hand!"

"You actually, then, expect to make conditions? Really, my good fellow, what is to make the countess accede to them?"

"Mercy!"

They walked for two hours. Feldern felt exhausted in the atmosphere of this mad sentiment with its exorbitant desires and its absolute hopelessness. He promised, not without secret misgiving, to tell Faustine of Clemens's misery at the idea of having wounded her; and then exacted that Waldorf should wait her good pleasure with entire patience; above all, that he should not fall again into dissipation and bad company, which only unfitted him for better society.

"Don't brag of your good society," said Clemens, angrily. "Things happen in it that bad company blushes at; and as to its conversation, bah! In bad company one knows what to expect. There is no deceit and no offense. But in your elegant, culti-

vated refinement! Oh, the piquant jests! The filth is well hidden, no doubt, under the veneer of a mock delicacy—*asafœtida aux confitures*. Men talk loosely enough among themselves, degrading all that is best, and then under a thin mask it is the same thing in a *salon*; some women blush, some pretend not to hear; none have the courage to appear offended. At last they do hear; they listen; they are—amused—it comes to that. I should think their fingers would tingle to strike a man across the lips for his boldness. And amid it all, young girls grow up—women, young and beautiful like Faustine. I know one man that goes to her house—I can see him—he is an old man; he lolls in his seat with his cane between his knees. His chin hangs down like a bag of jelly; his coarse, red cheeks are puffed out like bellows; his bloodshot eyes protrude, his lips are like sausages, and this creature begins to talk—the devil knows about what. His innuendoes are *salé* enough and they have no end. No one else can speak without being at once slain by a glance from his bad eye. He smirches everything. Nothing is too pure. Such men should be suppressed like certain books. Yet, he is good society—spare me your good society! Not three days would I let Faustine stay among such. When she sits opposite this low ferret—Kirchberg, I think they call him—

I feel sick. He said something once—she laughed—I trembled; but she had laughed in scorn.”

And so he went over it all, like a monomaniac, losing himself in the extravagances of his fixed idea.





CHAPTER XXIV.

Notwithstanding his tirade against good society, Clemens still promised Feldern to avoid bad companions. The latter arrived at Faustine's door with a wearied sense of a long-continued drain upon his sympathies. He found her in good humor and willing to receive the recreant once more into her good graces. He did not tell her, however, the plight in which he had found the young man, for he thought that if anything good was to come to the poor fellow her hand must not be withdrawn from him.

"His birthday is to-morrow," Feldern said.

When Clemens came to see her early the next morning she received him kindly and warmly.

"Now, my lost son, this little wreath is to celebrate, at the same time, your return and your birthday," and she threw toward him a wreath of fresh spring flowers. "I do not know anything sweeter

to give you than these, which have bloomed between snow and ice. They speak of hope, the best of gifts."

"I trust little in hope," replied Clemens, gloomily.

"What a materialist!"

"Realities fill me so little, I don't care to even dream of them any more. I am no materialist."

"Ah! One cannot help hoping," she said; and then suddenly: "Have you fixed on a time for your journey to Oberwaldorf?"

"I haven't thought of it."

"And what says your brother to that?"

"Nothing; he says little enough when he talks a great deal. As we don't correspond, I hear nothing from him."

"I often think the life there better—wiser for you, dear Clemens. And later, who knows—some great happiness may come to you."

"Is exile your birthday wish for me?"

"Exile! Clemens, you know I wish you well. I never lie."

"Oh, the world teaches one to make fine phrases; they are not lies."

"But one keeps those for the world—not for one's friends. They deserve better things at our hands. Fine phrases to them would be lies."

"Well, then, don't wish me happiness—do something toward it."

"Oh, theories are easier than practice ! What can I do for you ? Shall I paint you a pretty picture ?"

"Your own."

"No ; I am tired of myself ; let others paint me."

Faustine was so bored with the strain of weighing her every word lest the barrier she wished to preserve might give way, that she welcomed, with ill-disguised pleasure, the arrival of Cunigunde and her father as an interruption of this trying *tête-à-tête*.

A cold consent to the girl's plan of independence had been wrung from Frau von Stein. The sisters had cried, and then dried their tears ; but the father was heart-broken.

"She is young, and I am old," he said. "I suppose we must think of her future ; the old have none. I should have lost her had she married, and then she might have been unhappy. Now I must hope that I may still live to see her happy." But his heart was sore.

Cunigunde sat near him and rested her hand upon his. She had entered into that peculiar phase of feeling that all of us have known when long-fought obstacles have been removed to a long-sought end. A reaction which seemed like apathy possessed her. She felt as if she had dreamed and awakened. The day of her expectation had come.

It had risen colorless and cold, and the girl shivered a little.

Mengen came in and renewed his acquaintance with Herr von Stein and his daughter, and spoke so cheerfully and heartily about his family that a weight seemed lifted from all hearts.

"What a sunshine he always seems to bring," thought Faustine.

Matilde's marriage, too, was to take place shortly.

"I am glad for the lovers and glad for you, Cunigunde," said Faustine. "Such an occasion draws people together. One doesn't remain a stranger long in a house where one has laughed or cried in sympathy."

"I shall soon follow you, mademoiselle, and bring you letters and messages from your own people," said Mario, "for I can't let such a happy occurrence take place without me."

"Anything so happy?" asked Faustine, but Mengen did not hear the low-spoken words.

"I am glad, Count Mengen, you still believe in a merry wedding," said Herr von Stein. "Why should such a step be taken mysteriously? I like the old way—the dance and the frolic. For me, Cunigunde's marriage—"

The girl looked up with imploring eyes.

"Ah, well," said the old man, "that is over."

Cunigunde was to start the next day.

Feldern came with the intention of saying good-by to her, but his heart failed him and he turned and did not go in. The girl parted from Faustine with a quick and tremulous farewell. The old man asked Countess Obernau's permission to come and see her sometimes to talk with her about his daughter.

"You, too, will soon bring me some word of my darling child?" he said to Mario.

At dawn the next morning, after a night spent at a hotel in the city, father and daughter parted.

"And you are going, too?" said Faustine to Mengen. "I shall be very lonely. I wish it were Clemens who is going home."

"I return soon," said Mario. "My parents wish me to come; they need me."

"I wonder will I ever see you again," she said.

"Why not?" he asked.

She did not answer him, and they both fell into a mood where jesting seemed impossible. Her sadness was contagious. He felt her influence to be so overwhelming that it decided him upon seeking some explanation.

"Since I belong to her so entirely," he said to himself, "she must be mine! And what do I fear?"

She is free as I am. But will she give herself? She must if she love me—if?”

He cursed the doubt which his mind harbored while his heart repudiated it.

Eight days were to elapse before Mengen's departure, and a mist of unexplained trouble seemed to hang over Faustine. She felt as if her steps were bending toward some dangerous abyss of which she could yet hardly see the deadly peril.

“How can he go? Does he not see and feel how necessary he has become to me? It has been like fresh air—like spring; and the spring is here and he is going.”

Sometimes she reasoned with herself that the weeks would soon pass; that Audlau, whose last letter promised as much, would return, and that this sense of desolateness would then leave her. But somehow Audlau's return seemed to have become shadowy to her, like a future dimly veiled—she could fathom nothing. She could not understand herself. Some strange new sadness seemed to grasp at her heart-strings. Unconsciously she found herself comparing and thinking of these two men. Would they like each other? Both were strong and decided. Audlau could be cutting to those who did not please him. She wondered if they did not like each other, if they would clash in

mutual repulsion. Somewhere in the depths of her being Faustine was disturbed. Had she possessed the courage, the strength and the reason to look the thing straight in the eyes, to recognize in Mario's absence her only salvation, she might still have broken the spell that was slowly but surely encircling her in its vise-like grasp. Could she quietly have spoken to Mengen before he had spoken a word to her of the sole claim another held, and, through a short pain, restored him to that position of frank and honest friendship which had characterized the early days of their acquaintance, in his gradually regained calm she might have regained her own. Unfortunately, at this crisis, her reason, her strength and her courage—failed.

Toward Clemens in these days she was kinder and more lenient than formerly—less irritated than of old by his mistakes, and less prone to find fault with him. Perhaps she felt a sudden, vague terror and pity for any one who was the prey of such madness. What will a woman not do for pity? Pen cannot write or words paint the harm it brings to them—least of all for men to read; for pity is with men the grave of love. It is not always so with a woman, yet a man makes a mistake who sees in every expression of pity a token of love. While a woman

may not reciprocate a man's sentiment, pity sometimes assumes a garb so friendly that things are said and done that mislead, and this peculiarly when there is no such tie as that, for instance, which bound Cunigunde and Feldern. A woman is hardly to be blamed then if a smile, a glance, a sweet word spoken are interpreted as a promise. Women of a certain temperament, ardent, easily touched, forget afterward, and it is called a crime. But it is only their generosity that leads to this unconscious cruelty—a cruelty that lurks in a larger sense in a man's nature.

Clemens was happy.

“I knew I would touch her,” he thought.

At first he had only hoped she would accept his devotion; but—now—he hardly acknowledged to himself what he hoped.

Had such a love ever existed and won nothing back?

“Mengen gone,” so the young man reasoned, “she will miss him for a time, of course; he is to her an agreeable acquaintance; but what proves that they do not care for each other is this journey; he could not leave her.”

The thought of Audlau sometimes came to torment him, and he would wonder:

“Does that old love still linger? He has left her

six months, and she has lived happily enough. What man is there that sinks into despair, as I do, out of her presence? No, my heart only has known hers."

Sometimes he would sit a long time near her, silently watching her like some dumb animal, while she was wrapped in her own reflections. What were they? She drew or painted, and Clemens came in the early hours, when he knew that she would be alone. He asked very little of her. He tried not to disturb her. She seemed often lost to him in her work and thoughts. She was, indeed! If it occasionally occurred to her that her visitor was entirely neglected she would come out of her reverie and give him a kind nod and word and recognize his presence. He would then fancy she pleased to have him there. "She wants me to remain," he thought, with that strange and persistent delusion of a monomaniac.

"There is a nice book," she would sometimes say. "Read a chapter to me," and he would rejoice so to serve her, thinking: "She might have sent me away." But Faustine only wished in kindness to save him from the past consequences of his infatuation.

The evening before Mengen's departure her *salon* was full of people. He himself came in late. She

was talking with vivacity to hide the unspeakable sadness that of late oppressed her. Indifferent observers judge so superficially that she had deceived them all. The conversation had turned upon her name. They asked her how she came by it. "My father was Goethe-mad. He wanted to call his eldest son 'Faust,' but as his children were twin daughters, I received the name of 'Faustine.' Well, my mother, who thought it barbarous, called my little sister 'Adèle.' My mother died a week later, and my father did not long survive to be reminded, through me, of his favorite poem. My godfather 'Faust' has always had a weird interest for me. I used to think that in his restless striving, in his hunger and thirst for attainment, I saw foreshadowed my own destiny; but the second part has made it impossible to me. I think we all write our own second part to Faust."

"I do not think so," said Count Kirchberg. "Faust is the true story of all men who try to win and bring down heaven, piling Ossa on Pelion, like the old Titans, but never reaching what was never to be theirs—satisfaction. The stream of sensual pleasures is powerful, no doubt, and love, too, is wide; yet how contracted, after all, since it ends in satiety. Faust tries ambition—the glory of the world and its vanity. It all remains an insipid game. Art

treats him no better when he throws himself into her arms. As a last resource he tries good works and the love of his kind. But a certain lukewarmness and discontent remain with him, and he is thankful enough to take French-leave of this world and to disappear into the Elysian Fields."

"Ah, Faust only played at all these things; he did not work for their attainment. Better do something that even Mephistopheles laughs at, since, with all his worldly wisdom, he was only a poor stupid devil after all. I don't believe things are unattainable. I don't believe there are any limits to divine mercy."

"Write a second part to Faust," said Feldern, laughingly.

"I would rather live it; writing is such a poor echo of life. I hope that in a hundred years all writers will have been sent to Botany Bay. We have too many of them."

"What! Send them off, and all the pleasure they give us?"

"Oh, pleasure! They live for me they think for me. I would rather live and think for myself—draw my own conclusions, right or wrong, than take any one's else."

When Mengen came in Faustine's false spirits fell.

"You look tired," he said, quietly sitting down beside her.

"Oh, to death!" she said, sinking back.

"Why do you talk when you have no heart in it?"

"Why, you never obey your heart. You leave, and yet you know you want to stay. What are you going to that horrid wedding for?"

He did not reply, but with infinite tact took upon himself the burden of leading the others into a conversation so animated that she could, unnoticed, remain silent.

After a while they one by one took leave. She said her good-bys rather absently. And then these two were left alone. There was a moment of embarrassment. Faustine broke it. She rose and put out her hands to him.

"*Au revoir*, my friend," she said.

"Can I leave you so?" he said to Faustine. "I cannot!" and drew her to himself with the violence born of a long control. It seemed as if he would break her slight form. She trembled.





CHAPTER XXV.

“That is not right,” she said, eluding him.

“Pardon, Faustine,” he said, simply, and he released her; “but you see—I love you.”

She freed herself and stepped away from him quickly, throwing her head backward with a sudden movement. Her whole being seemed to irradiate as if transfigured. An ineffable triumph swept across her eyes and brow, and went to lose itself in a mysterious smile that lingered on her lips. It was the smile of a dreamy Bacchante. She looked up and reached out her arms as if seeking for support, and in a low tone of ecstasy she sighed, rather than whispered :

“He loves me.”

“Where will you take the pain and the passion if not to me, Faustine?” he said, intoxicated, and throwing his arms once more about her, he held her as if he would claim her to himself.

“He loves me,” she repeated with the same exultation. She drew his head down between her two hands and looked at him, still dreamily. “It is not true,” she said.

“Not true? Oh, Faustine, have you not felt that my whole being is lost in yours? That my heart has only learned to beat through yours? My mind to think, my steps to follow you? Is not that love, Faustine?”

As the rosy glacier grows paler and paler when the night’s gray shadows fall and envelop it, so she blanched, leaning as if broken on Mario’s breast.

“How terrible!” she said.

“‘Terrible?’ Faustine; why, angel of sweetness, you love me?”

“I?” and she passed her hand over her forehead; “I—you? You are strangely mistaken, Count Mengen.”

A sudden fear froze the young man’s blood. He pushed her from him almost menacingly and called her once more by name. She sank into her chair like a dead flower that the storm has touched too roughly. Large tears rolled slowly down her cheeks. She was as seductive in the abandonment of this attitude as she had been a moment before in the first surprise of passion. Mario found no courage to leave her.

“How can you lie?” he said, kneeling beside her.

“I do not lie,” she whispered, not looking at him.

He laid his folded hands upon her knees and said:

“Look at me firmly and quietly and then answer me: Do you not love me, Faustine?”

“No,” she said, so low that her voice died almost unheard, but her eyes met his, and he cried in rapture

“Your beautiful false lips lie, but your eyes say ‘Yes,’ Faustine; I believe them only!”

“No, no,” she cried in hot anguish, covering her eyes with her hands, “do not trust to their treachery; the mouth tells the truth.”

“Faustine,” said Mengen with unspeakable agitation, “if you really do not love me, if all was a game—the amusement of an idle moment; if you have squandered loveliness and grace in vulgar coquetry, if the whole thing has been a jest to you, if you anatomized my heart-strings out of idle curiosity—then I have no expression for my contempt!”

“Mario,” cried Faustine, sinking on her knees to the earth, “I love you!”

He lifted her up, clasped her again against his breast and drank on her sad mouth the ineffable bliss for which he had so longed. But Faustine met the masculine fire with which his lips sought hers with an almost faltering timidity. She made

a slight motion whose demand love alone could understand—a movement as if she would be free; and Mario obeyed instantly, releasing her, or rather, held her still, but lightly, supporting her slender figure, it is true, but not so closely to himself.

“Why do you drive back upon itself the overflowing of my feeling, Faustine? Oh, let my heart for a moment find rest in yours, beloved angel, now that I have known the truth.”

“You don’t know it all,” she said chokingly.

“There is nothing else; you love me, and to-morrow you will come with me to my parents, and then we will be married, beautiful darling, and go wherever you like; but you won’t leave me again, Faustine,” and he drew her soft hair through his fingers, gently touching the little locks that grew low on her forehead.

“Let me go!” she said, with deepest melancholy. “Nothing can help us—there is no hope.”

“Is it Audlau?” he cried, paling and grasping her arm with mute violence. “Answer me!”

She said no word, but cowered as one whom a death-blow has reached in the midst of health and of life.

“Don’t you see how much harder it will be to part now?” she said gently. “Oh, why did I not keep back the word of love!”

"Speak to me, unhappy child," said Mengen, huskily. "Why must we part? Who has a holier claim than I have? If another has had claims, they are mine the moment you love me. I will have you, Faustine, undisputed to me—alone, alone, my own—"

"I understand you," she interrupted; "but how could I be happy an hour, knowing that I had broken another's whole life? How could I say the word that should keep you beside me. Oh, it is impossible to me, Mario. Yes, you yourself know it."

"Faustine, you love me—only me. That must decide."

"No, Mario, it is Audlau that I love. I gave him the keeping of my whole future. He has been a guide to me—true, generous, unswerving."

"Really—not me? Not me—my heart? Try and remember."

She sank down at his feet, clinging to his knees and pressing her forehead against him with a low, moaning cry.

Shocked, he tried to lift her up, but she begged:

"Let me be here, Mario, and don't talk to me so. Oh, Mario, have some pity! Oh, ray of sunshine, how is it possible not to love you?"

She wept passionately.

"My angel, tell me all—all that troubles you," he

said gently, stooping over her. "It is so dark. When I know all some light must come to me, and I must decide. Come, the truth—the pure truth, as before your Maker!"

"As before my Maker," she replied fervently.

She sprang up, and they looked at each other.

Mario sat in his usual attitude, with folded arms, leaning against the table, where the wax candles cast a faint gleam upon him. The pallor of his face, convulsed with deep emotion, the glow of his dark eyes, thrown out in deep relief by the back of the *fauteuil*, made him look like some painting of Velasquez.

Faustine stood before him in a fuller light. Her soft white dress, her swaying figure, seemed almost unreal. Her lips and rounded chin were illumined by the glow of the lights, her brow and eyes partly in shadow. He, quiet, firm, immovable; she, wavering, so that one could not tell if she would fall to earth or be caught up to heaven. He, all man; she, all woman.

"Speak, my angel," said Mario, softly. "I will not ask a question. No word of mine shall interrupt you."

"What is it I have to tell?" Faustine asked herself, passing her hand over her brow.



CHAPTER XXVI.

“Ah!” she said, “what eyes can go deeper than the surface? And in these *esquisses de la vie*, what outside glance ever really penetrates? Truth is hard. When it does not lie it is sometimes unbelievable.

“My sister and I, our *pension* education over, poor little orphans, came to live with an aunt, who had a fine landed estate in the neighborhood of Bamberg. I think I was very much like other young girls. People talk of the experiences of childhood; I look back to mine as to an unawakened time, and hardly know what I was or felt. I think I was an earnest and happy child. My girlhood was serious and studious. I am a Catholic, you know, but I don't think I was ever very *dévoté*. I loved books, animals and nature

en bloc, and my aunt least of all. All my experience with the world has never yet taught me to cope with an *intrigante*. I never yet felt at ease with her.

“We met men at her house. Of course I danced sometimes with some of them, and their compliments made me laugh. Only Count Obernau seemed to feel hurt at my laughter. He was a handsome fellow, with regular features and a proud bearing. He belonged to an excellent family, and was rich. He was a young captain of cavalry, and twenty-seven. I pleased this man from the first, and he told me afterward he meant me to be his wife as soon as ever he saw me.

“Love to me in those days was as colorless a thing as is the prism before it comes between the eyes and the sun. His comrades could not doubt the success of such a *parti*. And then he was such a good fellow—spent his money freely, and was in for every frolic, and had such a charming weakness of character that a child could guide him.

“All these qualities, added to money and position, were indisputable advantages. When Obernau, therefore, threw down his handkerchief like a Sultan to me, and signified his admiration, other young men would have hardly dared to place themselves in rivalry. It seemed a universal under-

standing that he and I belonged to one another. Obernau, and forever Obernau, was rung into my ears.

“My aunt could not conceal her satisfaction, and she spoke of him always in a tone intended to impress me. At first she praised his excellent qualities; then she lamented over the bad influences his selfish friends exerted over his straight, simple nature. ‘A good, noble woman,’ she would say ‘could lead him to greater seriousness—could change him. There is a wife’s most glorious call.’”

“It must be confessed that while I had little confidence in my aunt, I had a great deal of respect for her cleverness. What she said seemed wise. Perhaps it is—if only the wife who gives herself to this heroic effort is a self-controlled woman herself, and not to be dragged down. I was an inexperienced child. What did I know of it all? If anybody wanted it, why, of course, it must be right. I engaged myself to Obernau. If I were to say that I was forced—if I were to say that I disliked him—it would be a lie. No, I liked him, and listened to him willingly enough. Then my sister, who had been married to a man whom I thought insupportable, seemed happy. From this I concluded that men must develop rare attractions after marriage, and my own preparations were made.

“ As the hour drew near, however, a change came over me. I grew breathless with a sort of wonder. I am not given to presentiments, but I felt as if some tormenting augury was to be fulfilled. This nameless and vague anxiety was foreign to my temperament. To whom should I speak? My aunt hated all analysis of feelings, particularly of such as clashed with her own wishes. She never said: ‘ Do not speak of them ;’ but she knew how to avoid all confidences. My sister, I have said, was married. It had made an enormous separation between us. Her husband was unattractive to me, and she seemed to have drifted from me. There is a certain virginity of soul more touching than that represented by the orange wreath. Alas, alas ! That it is often lost before this is worn—nearly always fades with it. It cannot resist the love of material things. My sister was soon lost in the interests of her new possessions, and sitting down in quiet self-satisfaction seemed to have abjured all the poetic dreams of our girlhood. She was of that type that take root in their household. She has stepped hand in hand with her own fate ; she has been in accord with it. One can say of her what I can never hear said of a woman without a shudder : ‘ She would have made any man happy.’ People think that is the highest eulogy they can bestow on a maiden. Well, I never

deserved that praise. To whom was I to turn with my empty forebodings? I decided to speak to Obernau.

"We were alone in the garden one evening, and a certain sadness of the approaching autumn had thrown its shadow on my young heart. I told him timidly of some of my fears.

"'All girls are so!' he said, laughing broadly, and his merriment, jarring on my mood, silenced me. Thinking it over afterward, I concluded that perhaps he was right. When I next broached the subject of my fears to him he changed his tone, and said he loved me so much—surely he would do all he could to make me happy, and that if I left him it would break his heart. This decided me. 'I will make him happy at all costs.' And now I awaited the wedding-day with a certain feverish impatience. I became his wife. How long ago it all seems to me now."

Faustine's head dropped like a broken lily, and she trembled from head to foot. When after a pause she resumed her recital, her flower-like face was paler than marble.

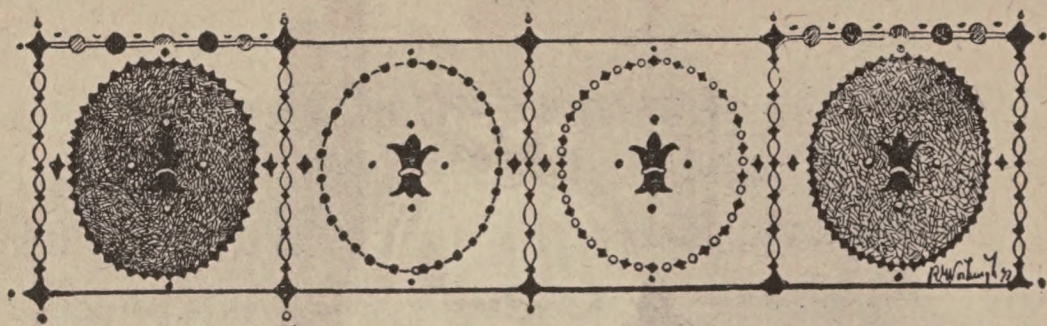
"I have overlived it," she said, and laughed.

Mario had never heard such bitter laughter from her lips before.

"Be quiet, Faustine," he said, laying his hand

upon hers for a moment ; “ for your own sake be quiet.”

“ Pardon me, Count Mengen,” she said ; “ don’t interrupt me. You wished to know my biography. Have you ever heard of the fountain of the Nixies ? They say if once you move away the stone, it rises, rises, rises, until it inundates the whole land in its cruel devastation. Oh, that flood of the unknown ! Were you wise to put a ruthless hand upon it—to disturb the stone ? Does it not even shake *you* in its rush and flood ? I am not going to read you a homily against marriage. People look in it for different things. Perhaps half of the women are satisfied, but among them all there will be one to whom it has proved a sacrifice which she is either too strong or too weak to support. Oh, this *one* ! There is no provision for her in your laws, and no escape, and from her ill-concealed unhappiness God and man withdraw their hand. People are content to laugh at her eccentricities ; for suffering, you know, sometimes makes people peculiar. Oh, this *one* ! There are troubles before which every one bows the knee—grand sorrows, decorated sorrows, triumphant sorrows—rose red ; but with this kind you do not coquette, this kind you bury shyly in your bosom until it becomes a grave.”



CHAPTER XXVII.

She wrung her hands and moved away a little as if forgetful of his presence, buried in the pain of her past.

“Oh, the careless swimmer who springs into the seething sea! What a labyrinth to enclose an innocent child! And the people stand looking on, curious, prying into the secrets of this new pair, wishing they might lift the veil that the girl in her delicacy draws closer and closer about her, and if the vaguest suspicion of unhappiness pierces through the external advantages, if those pretty eyes are suspected of shedding tears in secret, there are plenty of knights-errant ready to wipe them off.

“In those days I wept for myself; lately it has been more for the misery of others. I was astonished at the admiration I inspired, and sometimes the



FAUSTINE STOOD BEFORE HIM IN A FULLER LIGHT.—See Page 217.

sense of my own power gave me a feeling of degradation. Under the halo of the law, encircled by every protection, I felt as if there were wanting some security to my future. So I entered very young into a bitter frame of mind. I felt a secret detestation for those who fawned upon me because I was rich and *à la mode*. I groped in the hated bondage of a marriage to which I had brought no love. Tell me: Is the mark of my slavery still on my forehead? I wore a mailed armor about me, it is true, to conceal my sorrow, and armed myself with a light and careless frivolity of manner. I treated most men with a contempt that led them soon to fall into adoration. The outward brilliancy of my position jarred with the deep inward discontent that gnawed me.

“My husband loved and admired me *à sa facon*, but in his companionship I found nothing but the most corroding *ennui* or at times an impatient disgust. I was considered the most enviable of women; I knew myself to be unspeakably miserable. I would have liked to raise my husband's mind to sympathy with some of my own tastes, but I was married to a clod, and a clod he would remain. I was his plaything when he felt in the mood; he asked nothing more of a woman. I could, no doubt, have acquired a more complete mastery over him, but I despised

the means too much and the acted part. Perhaps I was too young to be wise.

“We gradually grew apart. I went my way, he went his. He did not trouble himself very much about what I did; I was his wife and he loved me—why should he? He had hosts of friends, and I was thrown almost entirely into the society of men. I read with them, I drove with them, I chatted with them—not because they particularly pleased me, but because they forced themselves upon me. My impertinences amused them, and when I ignored them they were piqued. They were not a very nice set. In my childish ignorance I fancied all men were much alike. I was more or less thrown with Obernau’s sisters, to be sure, but they only made me despise my own sex. One of them was about my own age and married. Hers was a scanty, thin nature that could never forgive me that my eyes were larger and my feet smaller than her own. The other, a young girl of thirty-eight, had from time immemorial led a *train de vie* that more or less alarmed aspirants to her hand in spite of her handsome dowry. Now quite *passée* and without charm, she posed for a *femme incomprise*, and said she had given her heart to God. Possibly this was because no man had appreciated the gift. This sterile piety, so late assumed, was a sort of tepid bath in which

Crescenz was steeping her past follies. The sisters were only of accord on one subject, and that was that there never had been, nor could be, such a coquette as myself, nor any one so vain and so frivolous. Crescenz rolled up her eyes, looked unutterable things, and pitied her poor brother.

“I don’t suppose Obernau *was* very happy. It would have been a very different woman who could have made him so. I had had my forebodings; he had not understood them. He knew nothing of love. And what is the mere attraction of the senses if not veiled by its heaven-born breath? So we lived together—bound—and apart. Oh, I have suffered! Our life seemed to hold no duties. When Obernau was absent I used to think over all his good qualities, and persuade myself his faults were only those of a neglected education. I would lay plans to improve him, and nothing seemed easier. Then he would come, and his first words almost always filled me with a sense of discouragement.

“Sometimes my husband came home very late, and I would know that he had been drinking and wondered, half frightened, what society he came from. Sometimes he was cross, peevish and depressed, and would swear at his friends and his own weakness. Then I was drawn to him in a sort of pity, and would beg him to leave the army and to

travel with me. He would accede. He was sick of the life. He would break with all old associations. We would go away wherever I liked—to Paris or Rome, and I could devote myself to my painting as much as I wished. I would fall asleep, rocked by the hope of this change—any change seemed desirable. But when Obernau had rested and his ill-humor was over he would laugh at my projects and call me romantic—his pet word as applied to me. He thought Bamberg good enough for him. My love of art was made the subject of unending witticisms. His entire want of sympathy threw me back upon myself, and I grew cold to him. How could I help it? My sisters-in-law rebuked me for my manner to Obernau and pitied him for having given his beautiful affection to a soulless doll like myself. How weary I grew of it! What rash act would have been inspired by my rebellious feelings I can not tell. It seems as if a heavy fog brooded over these years of marriage, and I hate to speak of them. It was later that the light came. I made the acquaintance of Audlau. Poor, hungry-hearted child that I was, with what unspeakable delight, with what inexpressible surprise did I meet one being with whom I found myself again!"

She paused a moment and then continued:

"Yes; it was just when my discouragement had

reached its height that I met Audlau. I turned to him—and— I loved him. It did not occur to me that this infringed upon my duty to my husband. To tell you the truth, I was so entirely inexperienced that I did not recognize the sentiment. I did not call it love, for by that word my husband called his feeling for me. This seemed such another thing that I could not have so desecrated it. But I did love him. My mind and soul bloomed near him; life opened to me. His earnest thoughtfulness seemed to quiet my unrest; it gave the small things that I had despised a new worth and significance. He seemed to look deeply into everything. His nature, too, seemed to change in its contact with mine, and to gain a lightness and gayety unknown to his usual gravity. I felt that he never judged me. Undeveloped, childish, and often inconsequent as I was, at that time, it would not have answered for me to be too closely analyzed. He forgot to analyze me because he loved me. My caprices, born of the unhappiness of my life, he forgave. A common man would have taken advantage of me, but Audlau was only touched. He used to smile and say the cold influences of the world would eventually calm the impulsiveness of my temperament. Alas, that we were shipwrecked in these aspirations!

"We were thrown much together. Strong in the sense of my innocence, I cared nothing for what the world might say. I felt so happy; I had found a man I could respect. Obernau used to ridicule my romantic admiration for Audlau, but he did not seem to object to it. Perhaps he did not think me warm enough to feel a mighty love. Men always think a woman cold who has not reciprocated their own sentiment. He thought me of marble.

"Will you let me hasten over this?" said Faustine.
"I cannot linger upon it.

"It was the old story. In my young head and heart there gradually grew a tumult that Obernau never guessed. There were moments when I began to dream of means to escape the pressure of my unhappy marriage, for love goes through its phases of development and so mine had to grow into a pain. Bound to one—loving another—my mind was distracted and torn. I longed for my liberty. Well, it came to me. Crescenz was always telling my husband that he was a dupe. One evening, they found Audlau with me in my *salon*. For the first time I had spoken of my unhappiness to my only friend, and—I was in tears. I think Obernau had been drinking. He asked the meaning of my emotion. Then he turned to

Audlau and spoke some insulting words. Audlau met him quietly and conjured him to spare me, to make no scandal. I stood like a statue—wordless, speechless, bereft of my senses. Crescenz had not fanned my husband's jealousy for nothing. It was only two days later when they had met, and Audlau, I was told, was dying, that I knew what to do. Like a tigress I rushed to him. I left my home. Reserve—all was lost. I never left his side through his illness. The world and Obernau were lost to me. My life belonged to him who suffered for me. I don't know anything more. I nursed him while his life hung between life and death, and I prayed for him. Obernau, who, I think, repented of his rashness, ordered me to return to him, first imploringly, then menacingly. I had but one answer: 'I will not cross again the threshold of the man who has degraded me and himself in the face of the whole world.' It was perhaps Obernau's revenge that he would never be separated from me. It was the same to me. When Audlau grew stronger I went to Nice alone with my maid, who would not leave me. He soon followed me into Italy. His wounded breast needed a mild climate. For two years he battled between life and death—two years of anguish, but in the midst of which we were happy. I lived in the utmost retirement, knowing nothing of and

caring nothing for the world. My aunt had died shortly after this catastrophe and had left me a competence and the bulk of her fortune to Adèle. I lived upon my little inheritance, as I live now, simply and unostentatiously—but—free—I had peace. How my soul flowered under the influence of art and of love! What a stream of multitudinous joy seemed to open me! How safe I felt!

“It was then I heard of Obernau’s death and could dispose of myself and my hand. I don’t know why I hesitated; that is a mystery I cannot explain. A fear of marriage possessed me. My unfortunate one had filled me with bitterness. I no doubt had false ideas. I was disillusioned, doubting God, men and myself. I wanted the fruits of the Hesperides, but now that they were offered to me I trembled and hesitated. Audlau never dragged me down. I reveled in the sense of his devotion and—of no tie. I was proud and strong, and determined to make a life for myself. This life left me entire liberty. We would disdain any fetters. *Vis-a-vis* of another man it would have been impossible. Audlau respected my resolve and said: ‘I will wait.’ Of course, he has always hoped in the end to combat it. Ah, that was my ignorance and mistake—to think that I knew best! He should have chained me to him. I locked myself in the sense of my

security and thought my feet safely upon a rock. To-day it has crumbled under my feet!"

"Therefore, Faustine, you must seek another footing," Mengen said, calmly and seriously, rising and taking her hand. "Where you have stood till now there is no safety for you. Prop yourself upon my arm. Let me support you. I will carry you over all waverings and hesitations. I thank you that I know all—and doubly that I have not found anything that need separate us."

Faustine looked at him in a sort of mute wonder, passing her hand over her eyes as if to convince herself that she was awake.

"It is I that you love," he said, "not Audlau. If you loved him, could your eyes have met mine as they did, and—could you have hesitated?"

"Ah, she said, "they could not. I could not."

"Now that you know I love you I will never leave you. You are bound to no man since your heart is free. It is a weak love that talks of sacrifice. Begin a new life to-day. A man who says to a woman: 'I love you,' and is not ready to feel that hell itself is changed into heaven through her, and is not ready to throw all away for her, is a coward. Cowards dare not love. I am not a coward. I will have the courage to make you amends for all you suffer now and have suffered in the past in every

circumstance that has hurt you. You will be my wife, Faustine?"

"Oh, I am too untrue," she said.

"What could be worse than to come between us two? Can you say to him now: 'I love another?' You love the beautiful and the lofty, Faustine; that makes your own loveliness—you could not bear it. Well, say you are weak. I don't want to defend this weakness—you might reproach me with sophistry or say I speak for my own advantage, but I believe if you were my sister I could not advise you differently for the half of life that would be yours would be impossible, to one like you. This dead thing hanging about your neck! Let the past lie; the present is too strong for you. Choose, Faustine, choose," he said, in a voice which showed that his self-control was almost conquered, "choose! It depends upon you now, if ever I cross this threshold of your room again. The love-word has been spoken, all is changed, it cannot rest between us—"

"Oh, all is possible to you, Mengen; you are strong."

"I am human, Faustine, and I love you! Do you indeed think me so strong? The strength of years I have kept for you. I think I knew you were to come. You belong to my innermost being, Faustine, for through you I have learned to understand

love. Is it possible you don't love me enough? And if your mouth says no—and your actions—still—Oh, I cannot believe that your sweet eyes lie!"

"There you are right, Mario," she said.

"You have decided, Faustine? You will hear me? Oh, angel, you love me!"

Mario's voice trembled and a sudden moisture sprang to his eyes. All the calmness, all the schooled reserve of the man of the world had vanished. The shield was pierced. Faustine looked at him; bliss and anguish, triumph and sorrow swept across her heart, and then she knew that she was powerless. As he had subtly said, the present conquered her; past and future were blotted out. She did not speak to him but only took his hands and placed them around her neck like a yoke.

"Have you understood me, Mario?" she said.

But Mario did not reply, and Faustine found herself for the first time in the presence of a sentiment before which her own looked pale and cold.

"Can I really then make you so happy?" she asked timidly.

"Oh, your love, Faustine!"

She opened wild eyes as he took her hand and led her to her writing-table.

"Now write."

"O God!" she said.

"Then I must," said Mario, gently.

"Are you mad?" she cried, beside herself. "No, only my hand is to thrust the knife into his heart. I know what I am doing."

"In mine or in his?" said Mario.

Faustine's hands were of ice; her teeth chattered.

"Write," said Mario. "It is only the decision. That once taken the struggle is over—peace comes. Faustine—write!"

He mastered her. A sort of shame possessed her beside his unswerving purpose.

"Oh, your tenacity," she said, "your confidence! They are God-given, Mario. What am I to struggle against them? But what am I for them to depend upon?"

"Lean upon me, Faustine, and write. See—nothing else is possible. If you cast me from you now where will you go? You cannot go to him. Will he not feel that you are not the same? Will you deny me, lie to him, tell him it was a passing fancy, that I was the amusement of an idle moment, and laugh with him at the wreck you have made? Tell me, Faustine!"

She seized the pen and wrote:

"Max, your last word to me has become true. I have forgotten you. No; not you, but myself. We must never see each other more, Max. With this decision I am ruining your life. I have

no courage to ask forgiveness. You will know best what you are to think of

FAUSTINE."

Her writing was almost illegible. Mario took up the sheet. He did not read it.

"Now the address, Faustine."

"Let us conclude the death-warrant," she said, with a touch of bitter self-contempt that sent a quick pain through her lover's heart; and she directed the letter to Nuremberg, from which place Audlau's last letter had been despatched.

Mario sealed the letter with Faustine's seal and kept it.

"I will send it myself," he said.

All this had been done in a passionless quiet, but now that she had obeyed, now that the last obstacle seemed removed, a flood of rapture invaded the young man's heart.

"Say that you love me! Say that you love me!" he repeated, sinking by her side.

"It must indeed be so," she said sadly, letting the hands that had covered her face fall into her lap.

Hardly, however, had their eyes met when all pain vanished in the mutual intoxication of their glance. Beautiful, with a rosy flush upon her face, she drew his head toward her, and, with the pouting grace of a child, called him every sweet, endearing name a loving woman can invent.

"Are you happy?" she said at last.

"Not entirely, Faustine."

"Oh, if you are not," she said sorrowfully, "then indeed I have done wrong."

"When I came from the ball with you," he said, "and found that mad Clemens here, my wildest dreams did not venture to hope for such happiness as this, but—perfectly happy I can be only when you are entirely mine. Come with me, beautiful one, to my parents. Let my sister's wedding-day be ours."

"Am I to marry you at once?" she said trembling.

"Why not?" he said proudly. "You will think my name good enough, will you not? Nothing of me can be worthy? But why wait? A thousand can admire you. Let me protect and guard you. Faustine, at once—to-morrow."

It was only an hour since that Faustine had spoken uncompromising words against marriage, but Mario's crafty hand had disarmed her, and she found not one word to answer in objection to his wishes.

"'And he shall be thy master,'" says the Bible. "Well, Mario, whenever you wish."

He gathered her up into his arms.

"Come," he said.

She made a supreme effort to be strong for them both.

"Now go to your parents," she said, pushing him from her. "They know nothing of me—nothing of us—of our love—tell them—know at least that I shall be welcome. Then come back and bring me some message from them. It will give me confidence and courage. Now—Mario—go."

"But in these eight days will you not have struggles—misgivings? I dread them for you—"

"You mean that you feel no safety; that you fear I may fall away from you?" she asked, with a smile so sad that it went to his heart with a great pity.

"No; but you may lose yourself in fresh terror."

"I will think that you are happy," she said, interrupting him, "and then my terrors must cease. There is now no room in my soul for any thoughts but those of you."

She seemed completely exhausted, she could hardly speak to him. Her cheeks burned as with a flame, her hands were as of ice. Mario, seeing this, could not yet make up his mind to leave her.

"What might not happen during my absences! I will not go to the wedding; I will stay with you."

But Faustine insisted that he should bring her some kindly message from his parents, almost with a febrile insistence.

"I am faint now," she said. "Mario, you must leave me—to rest."

"It is your nerves, not your heart, that are tired?" he asked her, with anxious solicitude and a tinge of personal uneasiness.

"Trust me," she said, sadly, "so far, and leave me. I think I shall sleep."

But when he had torn himself from her, "Ah! Why did I not go with him!" she cried. Chaos reigned in her. The elements out of which her new earth was to spring had not yet crystallized into certainty.





CHAPTER XXVIII.

Audlau found Faustine's letter in Nuremberg. He read it without understanding it. At last one sentence remained clear to him: "*Wir können uns nie wieder sehen.*" It was to him as if it had been night at midday.

"Horses—quickly."

He wanted to get away, he cared not whither—quickly—quickly, anywhere—only to move. He would not let the horses have rest. Through the sweet, lovely spring day he was whirled first to Prague then to Breslau. He did not know where he was. At the relays the people stared at one who seemed bent on such haste, and who had death upon his face. At last he reached a great dark city. It seemed as if some cloud enveloped and brooded over the streets. The tall houses frowned at him. This city pleased him. It was Cracow. Hardly knowing what he did, he stopped his *chaise*

de poste at the cathedral. He entered it and descended to the graves of the old Polish kings. He leaned against a sarcophagus, the vulture clutch of his desperate trouble gnawing at his heart-strings. In this atmosphere of everlasting silence the dust of death seemed to have fallen upon him with the dust of his happiness. A guide who lingered near asked him in Polish the cause of his grief. Audlau did not understand him. Then the old man seized his hand and said, with tears, in his old, trembling voice : "*Finis Poloniæ.*"

So these two stood side by side, one in the prime and vigor of manhood, the other bowed with the weariness of years. Life and death had met and stood hand in hand. They were both strangers; they could not understand each other. Each had his own lonely sorrow in his breast, and yet they were bound to each other for one moment, through the power of a common feeling, of a deep, unfathomable, unspeakable pain.

Audlau wrote from Cracow to Faustine :

"I have no word of reproach for you, no question to ask, no lament to make. Be happy if it is possible to you. Forget me, for that is the chief condition of your future happiness. Forget your entire past. With your temperament it will not be difficult. *Adieu.*"

For the moment, he remained in Cracow. Having

lost her, every place was the same. With her he had felt that he possessed the whole world in its glory. With the magic of her varied fancy she had touched into beauty for him all the commonest things. Out of the ruins of the world she had built new bowers, and the inspiration of their builders had seemed to live again in her. The silent pictures spoke to her and told her the mystery which the painter had breathed into his saints, the sculptor into his gods. Had she stood alone in Nature, she would have breathed a soul into the rocks, such an overflow of life was in her. Her inner self was enough for all the rest.

Audlau felt himself now to be imprisoned between cold walls. Sometimes he would be devoured by anxiety about Faustine's own destiny, of which he as yet knew nothing. He spent days reading over her letters; the last ones had become restless—hurried. He looked for a name that might give him some clue. She spoke only casually of strangers she had met, among them Mario's name occurred once or twice indifferently.

“How miserable she may become,” he thought.

He was more consumed with torment for her future than with dwelling upon his own. He belonged to that type of men of which Mario had once spoken to Faustine.

“When the thread of such a one’s destiny is cut,” he said, “no mending it is possible.”

Audlau’s old world having crumbled, he wanted no new one. He stood like a priest, alone, on the ruins of his temple—the palace of his joys was in the dust. Why should he want to creep into some hut for shelter? Sometimes he was seized with a blind rage against her, at her weakness, at her inability to resist the impulses of the moment. Was it a law of her being? Was her nature one to flower but to bear no fruit? Then, in the midst of it all, the thought sprang up in him that she was perhaps irresponsible, not willfully cruel.

“Who knows,” he thought; “I have failed—perhaps she is yet to come to some glorious development.” Then again he would think: “In breaking my life will she not have wrecked her own?”

When Faustine had received his letter she became calmer. Until that moment she lived in a perpetual fever. Now she knew she was forever separated from the man she used to call her providence, who would have refused a throne and any triumph he could not have shared with her. Not only in the first moments of his love, but through months and years of unswerving self-sacrifice, his worship had never flagged; there had been no flaws. The first freshness of sentiment had seemed

inexhaustible—not through any claim of hers, not through any sense of honor, but through the spontaneous impulse of a great devotion. She had seemed so to respect his love that she knew his one great hope had been to call her all his—in the end.

She recognized what she was resigning in throwing away such a love; but—she threw it away.

“I shall never know peace or rest,” she thought, and, trying to banish the terrors that beset her, she returned to painting and to society. Her friends found her colder, less merry, and less at ease. They wondered a great deal about her.

In these days of Mario’s absence Clemens still came to see her, and was taking more the *allures* of a friend whom she needed. She was too indifferent about him now to ask him not to come. She tried in every way to make himself necessary to her. As Faustine never spoke of either Audlau or Mario, Clemens began to hope they were forgotten. Mario wrote daily. His trust in her comforted Faustine. Her trust in him was a necessity.

“I have nothing else,” she said, “now.”

Mario’s parents were not too delighted with their son’s engagement.

“A penniless young girl would have been preferable,” sighed the Countess Mengen, and his father said, somewhat coldly :

"She seems to be a Circe, from what we hear. Have you allowed yourself to be ensnared, my poor Mario?"

Mario laughed. Faustine's new character amused him. She had always seemed to him far more imprudent than calculating, and he knew a planned conquest was an impossibility to her.

His sisters, however, were quite enchanted.

"Oh, I am so glad, Mario," cried Matilde, almost in tears of excitement, while Marie flew to Cunigunde to tell her the great news. Then Cunigunde had to come and repeat all that she knew of the lovely Countess Obernau, and all she had already told Mario's sisters.

Mario was quite touched at the girl's enthusiasm.

"She comforted, helped and supported me when all others were against me," said Cunigunde, with a glow in her deep eyes. "She smiled on me when all others frowned and did for me what others would only have promised." She said a great deal more of Faustine's charm, grace and talents.

"Is she very beautiful?" asked Marie.

"It seems so to me," said Cunigunde, but one never thinks of that with her, one who is too fascinated to care. I was laughed at once because I said she was like the *Mädchen aus der Fremde*. She is the only person who reminds me of her."

"*Mon Dieu*," sighed Countess Mengen ; "how will such a wonderful person ever fit into our circle!"

"Just like the sunlight into the world, mother," said Mario.

"I think it is so interesting, her being a widow and having had some sort of a story," whispered Marie, who was romantic, to Matilde.

"Hush! Mario is really seriously in love," said Matilde. "Oh, yes, awfully."

"Is she as infatuated with you as you seem to be with her?" said Mario's mamma.

"Oh, one can't weigh love," replied Mario, laughing, "and Faustine's less than any one's else. It would be clipping its wings."

"Has it wings! Will it fly away, my son?" said Countess Mengen, with solicitude. "These brilliant, exceptional women have so rarely the common sense, the settled principles which alone give happiness in marriage."

"Three months ago, dear mother, I said all this to myself about Faustine—I will be perfectly frank with you—to-day I love her, and, just as she is, she must make me happy."

"And this being so, she will be welcome," said Count Mengen, and he gave his hand to his son.

Mario pressed it warmly.

"Thank you," he said.



CHAPTER XXIX.

Faustine sat at her easel, painting, putting the last touches to a masterly picture. Work was the only calming potion possible to her, and now Mario was so soon to return. She occupied herself in a surprise for him. Her painting represented the street of an old town. A woman, half in shadow, sat in a window; a man looked up at her as he passed in the dimness of the tall houses. A ray of sunlight was upon him.

Clemens entered softly and came to look at the scene over her shoulder.

"I should be enraptured with that picture," he said, "if the man did not so closely resemble Count Mengen."

"Count Mengen has such a striking face that it clings naturally enough to an artist's memory," said Faustine.

"I think a peasant would have been more picturesque in these surroundings than a coxcomb."

Faustine could not help laughing.

"I don't know what you are talking about, Clemens; besides, you are prejudiced," she said, shrugging her shoulders.

"When do you return to *Ober-Waldorf*?" she continued, impatiently, provoked that Clemens's words had the power to annoy her.

"Am I still a bore to you?"

"Sometimes, with your peculiar views and moods," she said, too piqued to care to conceal her rather childish petulance.

"Have you ever been in Prague," asked Clemens, "across the Moldau, where they still show the bathroom of Queen Libussa?"

"Yes, yes; but I am talking of *Ober-Waldorf*."

"Do you know what happened in that room?"

"Oh, yes. The queen, proud of her independence, would let no man influence her. She determined never to know a moment's weakness—always to stay free. Any man on whom her eyes had rested with favor for a minute she had imprisoned in this chamber, and thrown headlong into the Moldau."

"You are the Queen Libussa of our time. The moment a person has ceased to be amusing to you, you have them thrown into the Moldau."

"The young fellow's words gave her a sense as of a cold knife-blade in her heart.

"Perhaps you are right," she murmured, humbly.

"But I shall not allow myself to be drowned in the Moldau, or to be hurried back to *Ober-Waldorf*" replied Clemens, excitedly.

"Oh," said Faustine, "I have not played the Queen Libussa with you. I never smiled upon you."

"Perhaps you have played it with others," interrupted Clemens, bitterly, "but certainly with me. You absorbed me into your life. When such a woman as you does this, you must know it becomes the whole of a man's existence—didn't you know it?"

"I have been very patient with you. I have had the kindest attentions. What was I to do to make myself understood? I have pitied you, Clemens."

"Ah, you pity me!" and he seized her hands and wrung them in his own.

"Do not change this pity to disgust," she said, freeing herself coldly and haughtily. "If I were a man I would die before my love should be twice repulsed."

"It is difficult to die when one loves," said the young man, gloomily.

"Why talk of death? You must live—live for better things," she said, speaking more kindly.

"Be a little more reasonable."

"*Bravissimo!* Countess Faustine, if you preach reason to me. No doubt there are plenty of treasures in store for me yet," laughed Clemens, scornfully. Then, in a changed tone: "No, I will wait—I will wait—into eternity, perhaps—but—when the one opportunity is gone—there is death."

"Do whatever you like, but hope nothing from me," she said, wishing to put an end to this unbearable interview.

She had turned her back to him, and could not see his face. After a moment's pause:

"Will you grant me one favor? Will you tell me to whom your future belongs?"

"To myself," she replied firmly.

"You force me to ask my question in another form," he said calmly. "To whom do you belong?"

"I am not inclined to answer you," she replied coldly.

"My God!" he said. "You might well answer this little question to one who is going away forever."

"Ah! You are going?" said Faustine, with ill-concealed relief.

"Yes; I am going."

"Where?"

"Where, I do not know; but when, I can tell you. It will be to-morrow."

Faustine breathed more freely. On the next day Mario must arrive. She would never be with Clemens alone again.

"Are you satisfied?" he asked her.

She gave him her hand silently.

"It is the first time you have given it to me willingly," he said, "since the first day we met."

"It is not going to be the last time," she answered, trying to speak lightly.

"Who knows, countess? And now, even if I seem importunate and over-bold, you will not refuse to answer the question I put to you just now. It is, indeed, the last. I go to morrow. If it is a secret to others you can depend on my silence."

There was something so solemn and even commanding in his tone that Faustine grew serious. She said nothing, but unconsciously her eyes wandered toward the picture, and rested on the sunlit figure that Clemens had recognized as a portrait of Mario. He understood her. Their eyes met—hers shrank a little.

"Why do you look so, Clemens?"

"It is nothing," he said. "I will come once more to say good-by," and reeling slightly he took up his hat and left.

Faustine threw down her brush—she could neither work nor think. She had herself driven

later to Madame von Eilau's. She found a great many people there, but no distraction from an unreasoning anxiety. Count Kirchberg drew her apart and tried to amuse her. His stories fell like lead upon her.

"I did not understand," she would say, coming back as from another world.

"I must be becoming very confused in my expressions," he said, laughing. "You are generally quick enough at understanding everything."

"Oh," she answered, disregarding his *persiflage*, "when one is troubled everything looks confused and crooked—words, people and things. One can't say one's A, B, C. One treats friends like strangers; one feels as if one were stuck in the mud."

She laughed.

"Did you ever feel so?"

Not waiting for his answer, she continued:

"When one drives a plow right over a man's heart, is God's hand there to throw in the good seed, count? Do you believe it? If we did not, how dreadful to have made the furrow."

"That would be making an easy life for egotists—to believe that for every pain they inflict God has the ready balsam."

Faustine felt cold; she shivered and grew pale. Count Kirchberg asked her if she felt ill.

"I am afraid," she said, and left the gathering.

Upon reaching home she asked her servants if any one had been inquiring for her during her absence. They said no one. Nevertheless she looked about her apartments anxiously. Did she fear Clemens or hope to see Mario? She did not know. She thought of them together with a sort of terror.

"Jeannette, I want to go to bed early," she said to her maid.

"Ah, I never heard my lady say that before, and yet is there anything on earth so nice as a comfortable, fresh, quiet bed? I should be more pleased to make it up if Madame were more pleased to go into it."

"Thank God, Jeannette, I am not always lazy!"

Jeannette, who was stolid, went on silently with her service.

Faustine fell soon, as was her wont, into a dreamless sleep as peaceful as a child's. When she awoke the next morning she felt as if she had bathed in Lethe, and it was some time before the day and its troubles made their way where the cool darkness of the night had enwrapt her. She was, unlike many women, loveliest by day. This is exceptional with people who are over sixteen. As persons grow

older they require the lights, the dress, excitement and movement of the evening to enhance their beauty—a factitious beauty. In the morning dreams have wearied them more than sleep has refreshed them. Faustine rarely had bad dreams, and she looked her best on a summer's morning. To-day it was not yet summer, only in her heart—for—Mario was to return. She leaned on her balcony. The trees, the cloudless sky, the twittering birds impressed her like some new revelation. Forebodings were forgotten.

“Mario,” she whispered, half aloud, and the day's fullness broke upon her.

In the meantime Earnest announced Herr von Waldorf, who had come early to say good-by to her. She allowed him to be admitted. Clemens had a bewildered air. The misgivings which she had put away overcame her once more at his approach. But he spoke very quietly.

“Next month it will be a year that you came to *Ober-Waldorf*. Do you remember all you told me during our walks?”

“Not a syllable, my good Clemens.”

“Then I will remind you of one word. You said of George of Frundsburg and of several others: ‘They realized that their time was over, therefore they died.’”

"Yes, I remember now. I thought it natural for such men."

"My time, too, is over, Faustine."

"You have had no time, child," she said.

"I have had hope," he said.

"Such hope is a deception," she said. "A strong man does not live on that."

"No. When he has proved it was a lie he dies."

"What is this rack you are imposing upon me?" asked the young woman, shrinking slightly. The beauty of the springtime seemed to be suddenly darkened.

"Ah, beautiful Queen Libussa! Is it not right, just a little half-hour, for the martyrdom you have inflicted upon me all this long year? Come, be valiant for a moment—why, a courageous woman like you!"

Then he drew a pistol from his pocket, raised it to his temple and—fired. As she stooped in horror over him, with a shriek—in the death-cramp his hand sought hers.

The alarmed household was soon upon the scene with wails and outcries.

Through all the tumult a man forced his way promptly into the room. The morning light came blood-red through the dark hangings.

"Why did I leave her! Why did I leave her!"



WE WALKED TOWARD THE OPEN GARDENS.—See Page 261.

he cried, leaning over the fainting form of Faustine.

Mario seized her in his strong arms and carried her into his carriage. In an hour he was taking her to his parents.





CHAPTER XXX.

“Genius, too, has its burdens,” I said aloud to myself at the grave of Leopold Robert, in Venice. A man who stood near gave me such a keen glance that his look arrested my attention. One so rarely meets strange eyes with interest. This man had been staring at the grave when we arrived, his arms folded, his head turned away from us, so that his head was hardly to be seen, and we had stared at him a little. Travelling is not a good school for manners. Some indescribable impulse led me to speak to him.

“I suppose you knew Leopold Robert?” I asked him.

"Only through his pictures," replied the stranger. Against my usual habit, I questioned him again.

"Are you, too, an artist?"

He smiled.

"Oh, no; the burden of genius was not laid upon me."

I flushed. I disliked to have my words repeated.

"It is a hard burden," he continued, "because the world will not recognize it. A gifted being is expected to be perfect."

"Yes," I replied, "it is unfortunate that naturalness in following one's bent is always called extravagance and inconsequence. Columbus was treated as a fool; Galileo as a criminal; of poor Leopold Robert, here, they say, more leniently, that he was a hypochondriac."

"Yes, yes," said the stranger, "sin and madness sound harsher."

As he spoke I again met his eyes. They seemed to cast a shadow upon his fine pale face. Later in the day we saw him again. It was in the Church of St. Mark. He bowed to us. His quiet manners and distinguished appearance led us to recognize at once that he was one of our own world. There was about him the entire simplicity of good breeding. He had a child with him—a splendid turbulent boy of six years—the sort of child one loves

to see, wild and full of fun and mischief, and with such lovely eyes! They grow tame soon enough. Being so alone together, and both dressed in deep mourning, one naturally guessed them to be father and son. There was, however, no resemblance between them, either in feature or in expression.

"Is he your son?" I asked the stranger, later, when we stood near each other.

"You wonder that I have such a beautiful child," he said, looking at the little fellow with proud eyes. "Yes, he is my son, and looks only like his mother, and is like her through and through."

Another day we met again, and we breakfasted together in the Café Florian. The boy frolicked on the place outside, chatting Italian to the gondoliers and German to the water-carriers. He wandered away a little, and his father, growing uneasy, went out in search of him under the arcades. We could hear his powerful voice calling "Bonaventura." The boy sprang out of the shadow of one of the arches and ran to his father, clinging to him and hanging upon him with the indescribable grace of a little cupid, or of a woman.

Later, I asked the stranger to tell us his own name.

"Count Mengen," he said.

"Mario Mengen!" I cried, astonished.

“Mario Mengen.”

“Ah, unhappy, happy one!” I said.

“You knew Faustine?” he asked sadly.

“As you know Leopold Robert,” I replied.

I had come to Dresden some years before, soon after the tragic catastrophe of Clemens’s death, and this and Faustine’s marriage with Mengen had been the general topic of conversation. Since then she had roused such enthusiasm in the world of art that every one had heard of her.

Our acquaintance with Count Mengen now ripened into one of those intimacies that draw people together in a foreign land. We lingered, as he did, several weeks in Venice. It was on the eve of our departure that, guessing all I longed to ask, he opened his whole heart to me. He spoke of Faustine, and asked me if my interest in her or in him was sufficiently great for me to listen to much that he would tell me. My heart beat with excitement at the thought. I had heard many cruel things said of Faustine. She had been to me a very interesting unknown, clothed in the mists of mystery. Now, at last, one who really loved and knew her would speak of her to me. My breath quickened. We walked on the Rive des Esclaves toward the open gardens. No spot could be more solitary. The Italians prefer to walk in the streets. The

garden lies on a point of land which has clear openings as well as dark alleys shaded by acacia-trees. These were in full bloom. The evening air was heavy with their perfume. We sat down upon a bench. We looked over the lagoons to the beautiful city, lying between sky and sea, in the gold of the sinking sun. O Venice!

I held in my hand a bunch of fresh heliotrope.

"Their vivifying perfume reminds me of her," he said. "*Fleur de l'amour!* She had such warmth and glow. She might have been a great character," he continued, as if thinking aloud. "There was but one thing—she was not severe enough toward herself."

After a pause he began to speak again.

"After the death of the unfortunate Clemens I took her at once to my parents. Three weeks after our marriage she was already their beloved child. They had dreaded the advent of this woman, this sibyl of the far-searching eyes and prophetic lips, who was to come with all her arts and sorceries to dwell among us. They found her a charming, simple girl, with something about her of the ignorances and timidities of childhood. She had never known this family life; she had been a lonely child, and her first marriage had taught her only suffering. Possibly she had never known love, although she

had mightily loved Audlau. In her ignorance she had told herself that love must wear no chains—not knowing that liberty can only exist within limits, and that outside of these lie its dangers. I taught her this. I had once said to my friend Feldern I want *un bonheur foudroyant*, nothing less. It was mine!”

So, gradually finding that I was wrapped in his words, he was led to say more and more.

“She gave everything inspiration. I never wearied of looking at her. Her soul seemed to breathe out a mysterious loveliness, and yet she was transparent as the day. Her eyes were of that uncertain gray color which reflect all shades. They grew from light to dark in the balancement of feeling. Her complexion, too, varied. In her color one might divine her mood, as, in the varying shades of her eyes, which gave to her blooming face a charm of melancholy and of passion. There was a rich simplicity in her, something of the primitive sweetness of Nature. In her, sunshine lay near to the tempest. She had almost fevered impulses, so ardent were they, had not the mind calmed and balanced them. Oh, how she would rush to meet me when, after a long absence, I came back to her! She knew my step in the ante-chamber; she guessed it without hearing it, but she would stop when she

approached me and wait for me; wait that I should carry her away in my arms. And her voice! I can hear her now saying: 'Mario!' In its modulations lay hidden again analogies with Nature. When she spoke to me of her half-forgotten childhood her tones were quiet and monotonous, like those of the sleepy rills that glide under the tangled meadow-grass. They did not vibrate, because she spoke of a time when her heart had not yet spoken. But when she touched upon the anguish of her early married life, there crept into them a pathetic cadence, like the rustle of the falling leaves. Did you ever, on a hot summer's noon, listen to that strange, breathless flutter that penetrates the senses—the faint sougling of a wandering breeze in the tree-tops, the movement of insect wings, the splash of a wave on a distant shore? Under the magnetic power of the sun, grass, flower and waters all seemed to speak some new-whispered language unheard, unknown before. Such was her voice when she lay in my arms, her soft, burning lips close to my face, murmuring the sweet and incoherent words which only love understands, because love alone invents them. Then, again, her tone of jubilee and of rapture rang clear from her bosom, like the lark's morning carol; or, if melancholy remembrance oppressed her, it would

sink into the low cooing of doves. Sometimes I felt as if all temperaments were blended in hers. She could have been as hotly jealous as the Andalusian girl who hides the little poniard in her garter, with which she shall presently punish or avenge her lover. Or, again, she could lie dreaming away the hours, with half-closed eyes, like some Oriental princess lost in an indolent calm. It was hard for her to yield her own will, but she used to ask me to teach her, and I tried to do so, not because I wanted her to obey me—her love was all I craved—but because I wished her to learn to control herself.”

Mario sighed, and then continued speaking:

“What strange fatality swayed her nature! Striving was her happiness, the moment of attainment her life. Yet, as her hand grasped what she had long for, or closed over it, it seemed to fall helpless and allow all to drop from its open palm.

“Soon after our marriage we went to Florence, where I was sent as *chargé d'affaires*. Faustine was glad to leave Germany; it held for her too painful memories. Yet—I knew she half feared she might meet Audlau in Italy. I knew that the thought of him lay often heavily upon her. ‘I think it would be easier for him if he knew I were happy,’ she once said to me. She sorrowed over him some-

times, and I knew it, but she never regretted what she had done. Had it not been so I could not have lived.

“‘O God!’ she would say, pacing the floor, ‘was it my fault? Was it my fault? How is it that all these floods have gone over me and I am the same! I can still live and love; I can still believe that God breathes divinity into us. I have still illusions, dreams and hopes.’ So she would talk herself calm again, and more and more seldom came these sad paroxysms to disturb our happiness.

“Her artistic talent seemed to bloom into redoubled power under the influence of Italian skies. She worked with enthusiasm and delight. Bonaventura was born in the first year. Mario has been the name of the eldest son in our family for many generations, but Faustine pleaded and prayed. ‘There can never be but one Mario for me; I could never find happiness in any other. Give him another name.’ I, of course, yielded to her whim while she threw her arms about me. ‘Oh, I love you!’ she said. She loved Bonaventura, too, but differently.

“‘I want him to be like me,’ she would say, ‘that he may remind you of me when I am dead. She never saw her picture in the child’s—but mine. He would be a consolation, she would say.’”



CHAPTER XXXI.

“Four years we lived in Florence. Oh, she was happy! Yes, I am sure she was happy! In those moments when the lava in her heart overflowed, when we were all in all to each other, when our thought was the same and sympathy entire, she would say: ‘Oh, why isn’t life an unbroken chain of such moments! Why isn’t rapture always the same! Why can we not stay at the climax all the time!’

“‘We should be gods and not men,’ I would reply, laughingly.

“‘I want everlasting rapture,’ she would reply.

“‘God has given me this, Faustine, in your love,’ I said. ‘A hundred times I may have been mistaken, a thousand times I may have been in fault—in your love alone I have found the eternal. It has made me strong and good.’

“ ‘ Mario,’ she cried, throwing herself upon my heart with a violence that set my whole being vibrating in unison with hers, ‘ Mario, this love is my triumph and my vindication. But do you never feel that it lifts us up to heaven to-day, but thrusts us to-morrow into hell? Mario, in the moments of ecstasy, when our souls rest in each other, when we understand each other without words, we are as it were in the blueness of heaven; but there come other moments when I have nothing to say to you—at least nothing I might not say to any other as well. We fall into smaller things. In those commonplaces we differ sometimes, and just because they are so small, each thinks the other might yield. When I want you near me; when I would like you to wander out into the beautiful sunshine with me, you have pressing affairs, you speak quickly, almost impatient at interruption; or, when I am deeply engaged in my work you come to have a talk with me; we disturb each other. Your words are colder, our kiss is quiet. You seem indifferent. I feel it, and I think you feel it too. Then I am unspeakably miserable, and neither your voice nor smile has a power to charm away dark fears and broodings that paralyze and weigh upon me. Then I think if this were the right kind of love no such moment could ever

come. Oh, I can understand the old Montaigne when he says: '*Il n'y a de satisfaction ici bas que pour les ames ou brutales ou divines.*' Mediocre creatures such as I am can only have it in mediocrity. Surely the holy ones in heaven know no weariness."

" 'Well, Faustine,' I answered, 'I, too, can quote Novalis: "As no mortal may lift the veil of Isis, we must strive to become immortal." '

" 'Yes, that we will, and you are already an angel,' she said.

"This conversation took place one evening as we climbed up toward San Miniato. We stopped to rest under the cypresses of the convent of San Francisco. I leaned against one of these somber trees and looked down on her. She sat on a stone step with her folded hands lying in her lap. The wind blew about the little locks of hair on her forehead. Her face and dress were illumined by a pink glow from the sky. Suddenly she stretched her hands out toward me and cried:

" 'Mario, always to worship—that would bring peace.'

" 'No human being can merit it from you,' I said.

" 'No—but God,' she replied.

"These words were not unnatural, nor did they startle me at the time. She turned the subject and

told me I looked like Antonius at that moment. I laughingly repudiated such fulsome flattery.

“‘He died for his king,’ she said, sadly. ‘Must you, too, die, my love? I bring misfortune to those who love me.’

“‘But not to those *you* love, Faustine,’ I said, just touching her hand.

“‘Oh, yes, yes,’ she said, with a heavenly, sweet sadness.

“We arose in silence and walked on. Words would have jarred upon her then and only aggravated her mood. Sometimes, with a sudden pang of maddest jealousy, I realized that shadows of the past still came between us. Who could pluck them out? The present, however, was so much Faustine’s tyrant that my jealousy could not be longlived. We once spoke of Corinne, and I expressed impatience with the love story. How could such a splendid woman care for that morbid *trouble-fête*?

“‘Oh, it was pity, pity, dearest heart! You men don’t understand it.’

“‘Perhaps I do not. I don’t think it would lead me farther than to let myself be loved. Fancy Corinne dying because Oswald didn’t love her any more! It is for the man to die for the woman,’ I said.

“‘Ah, well, love is our element. We are at home

where you are strangers. It makes us despotic. We should die only when we cease to love. When a woman's heart has ceased to pulsate that is the end. To love—that is consecration! I wonder if an inspiration might not come that would raise us above human love? Who knows? Do you know at twenty what you will need at thirty?' She spoke low, as if to herself. 'I had not an opinion, a sentiment or a thought ten years ago that I hold now. I suppose it is high good fortune to find at the entrance to life a being we are to walk with through life; but oh, how rare! Two people can so seldom grow and keep pace with each other—one flies faster. If we change so—why should love be the clinging to one object?'

"'Is it love or self-love you are speaking of?' I asked, a little bitterly.

"'I was thinking of Vincenza Sonscky,' she said. 'What a sad story! Self-sacrifice, yet no happiness. Her husband alone in old age; Ohlen alone in his youth; she dying! Oh, Mario, tell me you are happy!'

"Faustine's art filled much of her time, and she was pleased at the immense success some of her pictures won at the Milanese Art Exhibition. She used to amuse herself, in these days, writing songs. They were as subtle and sweet as her own strange

personality. When I told her how much they were admired she used to laugh.

“‘If they are popular they cannot live,’ she would say.

“Yet with all these occupations she seemed to me restless at times, and I suggested that we should travel—go to the East. One grows so one-sided, always at the same place and work. Faustine hated routine. Every character must have the faults of its virtues.

“Before starting upon our Oriental trip we returned to Germany to see our parents and to show them Bonaventura. My sisters were now both married, and Cunigunde was again engaged. Our surprise was unimaginable when she presented her *fiancé* to us. ‘Feldern was a hero to this man,’ Faustine said to me, apart. She congratulated him gracefully, but to Cunigunde she could say nothing. The man was a neighbor—stoutish, middle-aged and rich. There was little else to say about him.

“‘She talks of him as if he were an apostle,’ Faustine said, later. ‘What has come over Cunigunde’s clear vision!’

“‘It is as I told you once, dear angel,’ I replied. ‘Perhaps she was afraid of being an old maid. They say this fear will make a woman lose all perception. I suppose the girl has to talk herself into

a sort of fanaticism about the man. Let us hope her pride will keep her afterward from acknowledging that she is not content.'

" 'Well, you once warned me that Cunigunde's aspirations must go to the winds, like other people's,' said Faustine, half laughing and half crying. 'But Feldern was a gentleman in spite of his little priggishness. This man is so ordinary, such a sham. Tell me, Mario, are all our aspirations only the *Fata Morgana* of imagination?'

" 'I have grasped mine,' I said.

" 'My parents took much pleasure in my wife and child. They were proud of Faustine, but she was very quiet with them—folding her wings that others might not feel they had none.'





CHAPTER XXXII.

“We went down the Danube to Constantinople, to Greece and Palestine. I can give you no account of the voyage, countess; the remembrance awakens too much within me.

“‘I would like to die here,’ she would say. ‘All is so beautiful. Oh, Mario, I cannot grow old! It is a horror to me. I want never to know old age. I want to feel without being blunted—to work without fatigue to the end. I would like to die here. It would be easier than the hurried life we have left behind.’

“It was in the East I reached the culmination of my happiness. It was all over after that. Upon our return to Florence Faustine’s whole being seemed to change. The sadness that had sometimes clouded our days, that I had thought would entirely vanish, now became a settled melancholy. She was not ill, eccentric or unkind, but the shadow was

there, and there was nothing to say. Is this the dowry of genius—that it is a spendthrift of pleasure and must end in satiety? I always have felt that Faustine had genius. What was this she had aspired to beyond? People would say that she made chimeras and troubles for herself because destiny had made a spoiled child of her. Yet Faustine never seemed such a woman to me, and her fate is sad because it gives others weapons against her. She gradually withdrew into herself.

“‘I don’t want to travel any more,’ she said. ‘People and things are all alike. The outer life can be quiet, the inner still aspiring. It might be so in a cloister,’ she added, very low. She was never impatient, never harsh, but when I implored her to again take up her painting or her pen, ‘What for?’ she would say. ‘What does it amount to? A few verses, a few pictures that would be forgotten in less than a hundred years.’

“A profound discouragement seemed to crush her. I grew hurt and pained. I accused her of hiding some secret grief from me—of a want of confidence.

“‘*Tais toi*,’ she would say, ‘my time is over. You must see it, you must know it. These years, dear Mario, were my highest blooming time.’

“‘You do not love me any more,’ I cried, in anguish.

“ ‘*Mon cher,*’ she said, with a glance I never saw on any face but hers, ‘did you not awaken love within me? Is not Bonaventura your son? My beloved, I never loved anything *but* you, *after* you I shall love nothing, but *over* you—God! O, my angel! My soul met thine in an ecstasy, that I can only live in. We have drunk the depths of the golden cup—what is there left, my own! Perhaps—less sweetness—perhaps—the dregs.’

“ ‘Faustine!’ I cried, I know not with what voice, for she fell trembling in my arms and said, quite softly :

“ ‘Ah, if you are angry with me then I cannot open my soul to you.’

“I dared not intimidate her. ‘Child, what will you do?’ I asked in deathly anxiety.

“ ‘Give myself wholly to God ; go into the cloister.’

“ ‘Never! Never! Never!’ I cried, clasping her close and warm.

“She said nothing more then, and I left her. We were passing a few weeks at Pisa, where the court was for a month. We met Kirchberg here, Faustine’s old friend. He rode with us every day. One day he told me that Audlau was in Italy, and, whether purposely or inadvertently, that he was ill, and that his physician had sent him in search of health.

“Faustine adored the Campo Santo. ‘I can think there,’ she would say; ‘that is enough.’

“One day she said she would ride there with us, and sending back her horse would wait for the carriage that was to go for her later. Kirchberg and I prolonged our canter for an hour or two. Coming home we met the carriage, but it was empty. The footman told me Madame la Comtesse was not to be found, but that her sketching materials had been picked up on the ground in the Campo. A vague alarm seized me in spite of Kirchberg’s assurances that she had probably met and gone to drive with some acquaintances. Our usual dinner hour drew near. I could not quell my anxiety, and was just about starting in quest of her when her light step sounded on the stairs. In a moment she came in. I can see her still—tall and pale, in her riding-dress, tottering like a broken lily.

“‘He is here! He is here!’ she said in a stifled voice. ‘He is dying, and does not wish to see me.’

“Audlau was in Pisa, sick unto death of his old wound. The mild air had tempted him to the Campo Santo. He had gone there in the care of his physician. Faustine had seen and recognized him, notwithstanding the ravages of illness. She had started forward with a cry, but Audlau had warned

her from him with a gesture of horror, and had fallen back in a swoon in the arms of his attendant, and they had hurriedly taken him home. The unhappy woman had followed them. The physician had begged her to leave them before he should recover consciousness. She had knelt in the hall near the door. 'May I stay here?' she had asked. After a time Audlau had revived. 'He never asked for me,' she said. 'I thought of you, Mario; of your anxiety. I came home.'

"All this she related so incoherently, so tremblingly, that we could hardly understand. Kirchberg went at once to Audlau.

"He had known him well once. He promised Faustine to send word as to his condition. At first it was always the same.

"Faustine paced her room. 'I am killing him!' she would say. 'Clemens I ruined, body and soul. Now I have wrecked another life.'

"Toward midnight Kirchberg came himself with a hurried message. 'He cannot live the night,' he said. 'Come.'

"Kirchberg lifted her into the carriage. He told me all afterward. When she went in the death-sweat was upon him. She whispered softly: 'Max!' He heard her voice, opened his eyes and smiled. He tried to reach her hand, said 'Ini!' and expired,

He had given her every breath of his life, even the last.

"The following night we rowed by torchlight, in a bark, down the Arno to Livorno, where his remains were laid in the Protestant cemetery. Faustine was present. She seemed to seek the suffering with a sort of avidity.

"‘My soul is a desert, Mario,’ she said afterward. ‘I have touched the depths of martyrdom. Let me go! Let me go! God! There is nothing else!’

"‘You are killing yourself,’ I said in my despair.

"‘Nor life, nor pain, nor joy, nor sorrow, nor love—nothing can fill me any more,’ she said. ‘I am tired. Let me give up all that once I loved so well, and see if some peace will come.’

"In my discouragement I consulted a celebrated physician. I persuaded Faustine to talk with him.

"‘Her mind seems troubled,’ he said, ‘but there is not much amiss. I wouldn’t thwart her much.’

"I then spoke to Father Giralmo, Faustine’s confessor.

"‘It is a vocation, signor,’ he said.

"What more have I to tell you?"

Mario Mengen paused, his face half hidden in the gloom.

"You know the rest. All the world knows it. A short time after, the pope had dissolved her mar-

riage vows and given her a dispensation to enter the novitiate of the *Vive Sepolte*. Five months later she died. Too late she learned that our life, like that of Moses, is only to be one glimpse of the promised land. Poor, wounded bird, whose wings beat forever against the laws of human destiny. Rest, tired heart, rest at last!"

His voice broke.

"I have little else to say, countess. My thought runs slower than it used to."

He laid his hand on his boy's head. The child, weary of play, had fallen fast asleep, long ago, upon his father's knees. I clasped his hand silently, and we said: "Good-by."

He walked away toward his gondola with the sleeping child still in his arms.

My companion was to come for me here, and I already saw him approaching under the trees. I heard the plash of the gondola's oar. A song, sung far away across the lagoons, rose and died on the summer's night. Mengen put off from the shore. I have not seen him since. He left Venice the following day. As we wandered away I spoke to my companion of Mengen—then of Faustine. "Ah, sublime egotist!" I said. "Such women are the avengers of our sex. Men think at such a fountain to drink undying pleasure. All this wealth of

beauty and passion promises so much ! How strange that it is often given to the narrower and commoner minds to recognize the vampire nature which shall break first others and then itself. They can weigh, they can bargain, they can calculate. To them is given a way of escape. Only the best give themselves."

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